



# CITY NEWS

January 2019

## FROM MAYOR OLSON

### HELLO HOUSTON!

I am looking forward to serving a second term as your Mayor and pledge to do the best of my ability to serve you and our town. I would like to think that last two years went well. There were no major problems or surprises during this time, which was due, in part, to the very competent City staff that we are fortunate to have.

There are several projects going on currently, such as the radium treatment facility on South Grant. When completed, it will remove the radium from the water supply and also help remove the rust that has plagued our water system for so long. There are other projects yet to be done that will improve the quality of life here in Houston - so there's much to be done! By working together, we can make Houston a place we that can be proud of, and just glad that we live here!

Wishing you all a happy, prosperous New Year. Feel free to give me a call with any concerns or comments you may have. 507-458-7841.

*Mayor Dave Olson*

## WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION

The City's official newspaper publication is the Houston Banner, where you will find legal notices, job ads, and Council minutes. Legal notices are also posted on the bulletin board inside City Hall.

Information can also be found on the City of Houston's website and Facebook page, such as building permit information, the City Code, meeting calendar, important weblinks, and Council agendas/minutes.

City of Houston [www.houston.govoffice.com](http://www.houston.govoffice.com)

Hear the latest.... Attend a City Council Meeting. (typically the 2nd Monday of each month, 6 pm).

## NOTICE OF WATER RATE INCREASE AND NEW FORMAT FOR UTILITY BILL EFFECTIVE JANUARY 2019

Many cities in Southeast MN, including Houston, have had radium levels in excess of standards and have built a water treatment facility. Houston began construction on a treatment facility in November 2018 to treat for radium, iron and manganese. The total project cost is \$3.10 million.

Funding comes in part from a \$500,200 loan and a \$323,016 grant from the MN Drinking Water Revolving Fund, a \$1,677,784 grant from the MN Water Infrastructure Fund, and a \$600,000 Small Cities Development Program grant from the Department of Employment and Economic Development.

In addition, the City must set water rates to adequately finance the new loan, operation and maintenance of the water system, and maintain reserves in the Water Utility Fund. In order to accomplish this, the water rates will be increased in January 2019. The increase will be \$13.12 for most households. The following rate schedule will apply:

Previous Rate: \$16.88/mo. (includes 2500 gal.) + \$0.64/100 gal.

2019 Rate: \$14.00\*/mo. (no gal. included) + \$0.64/100 gal.

2020 Rate: \$14.00\*/mo. (no gal. included) + \$0.80/100 gal.

\*For commercial and multi-family, the base rate will vary.

## NO MORE POSTCARDS! INSTEAD...



**The City will begin sending the utility bills on regular paper in an envelope.**

# CITY COUNCIL / STAFF

<b>CITY COUNCIL</b>	<b>PHONE</b>
<b>Mayor David Olson</b>	<b>507-458-7841</b>
<b>Emily Krage</b>	<b>507-429-2500</b>
<b>Cheryl Sanden</b>	<b>507-450-1701</b>
<b>Tony Schultz</b>	<b>507-459-3731</b>
<b>Matt Schutte</b>	<b>507-429-3596</b>

<b><u>AMBULANCE/ EMS CREW</u></b>
Christine Cox, Director
Brad White
Darin Wendel
Tom Hill
Becci Rediske
Dave Runningen
Tim Jergenson
Lisa Schultz
Chris Kildahl
Mary Burt
Nathan Nelson
Dana Kildahl
Anna Frauenkron
Tony Schultz
Renee Kinstler
Rachel Boldt
Matt Schutte
Byron Frauenkron

<b><u>STANDING CITY COMMITTEES:</u></b>
<p>The following committees meet regularly to discuss issues and make recommendations to City Council. Please contact City Hall if you are interested in serving on any of these committees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Tree Board</b></li> <li><b>Park &amp; Rec. Board</b></li> <li><b>Planning Commission</b></li> <li><b>Economic Development Authority</b></li> <li><b>Library Board</b></li> <li><b>Off-Highway Vehicle Project Committee</b></li> </ul>

<b><u>FIREFIIGHTERS</u></b>
Steve Skifton, Chief
Brent Carrier
Craig Conley
Allen Frauenkron
Byron Frauenkron
Rick Geiwitz
Ryan Geiwitz
Thomas Hill
Tim Jergenson
Kathy Jumbeck
Kevin Jumbeck
Kevin Knutson
Brandon Olson, Asst. Chief
Mark Olson
Chad Rosendahl
Matt Schutte
Joe Krage
Brent Stampka
Randy Thesing
Chris Tuveson
Matt Van Gundy
Darin Wendel
Ken Witt, Ass. Chief
Jay Wheaton, Asst. Chief

<b><u>CITY STAFF:</u></b>
<p>Houston has a group of very dedicated employees who work to make Houston a great place to live and do business. The City currently has six full-time employees and seven regular part-time employees, plus ambulance and fire crews.</p> <p><b><u>Part-Time:</u></b>                      Audrey Hegland, Deputy Clerk                      Amanda Langheinrich, Custodian                      Suzie Peterson, Finance                      Bethany Peterson-Lee, Library Assistant                      Connie Verse, Nature Center Assistant                      Sarah Joy Wexler-Mann, Marketing/Chamber                      Susan Wiegrefe, Nature Center Manager</p> <p><b><u>Full-Time:</u></b>                      David Breault, Police Chief                      Liz Gibson-Gasset, Librarian                      Brett Hurley, Assistant Police Chief                      Ed Jacobs, Maintenance Assistant                      Christina Peterson, City Administrator                      Randy Thesing, Maintenance Superintendent</p>

# DEPARTMENT NEWS

## CITY HALL

**CHRIS PETERSON**  
City Administrator  
**SUZIE PETERSON**  
Finance  
**AUDREY HEGLAND**  
Deputy Clerk

## POLICE

**DAVID BREAU**  
Police Chief  
**BRETT HURLEY**  
Assistant Chief  
**MATTHEW FETZER**  
Part-time Officer



**SUE WIEGREFE**  
Manager  
**CONNIE VERSE**

The City has many projects in the planning stages or under construction which is keeping city staff quite busy. Look for more frequent updates from City Hall to be inserted in envelopes with the utility bills.

Questions and feedback are always welcome. Please feel free to call a council member or City Hall if you have any concerns.

## PUBLIC WORKS

**RANDY THESING**  
Superintendent  
**ED JACOBS**  
Maintenance  
**AMANDA LANGHEINRICH**  
Custodian

**Phosphorus:** Controlling phosphorus is an important part of protecting Minnesota waters. Please do your part to reduce our phosphorus levels that enter our sanitary and storm sewers. See below for how you can help!

- Use low or non-phosphorus dishwashing liquids and soaps.
- Use laundry detergent with low or non-phosphorus.
- Wash the car on the lawn to prevent phosphorus-laden rinse water from running into storm water sewers.
- Collect organic material (leaves, grass clippings, etc.) from street drains and gutters.
- Use phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer.
- Use lawn mowers that chop up grass clippings and leave them on the lawn, reducing the need for fertilizers.

**Violation of City ordinances may result in an administrative fine of \$75 and/or criminal charges and penalties.**

### ATTENTION PET OWNERS

**License your cat or dog:** By obtaining the required license for your animal, should it become lost or missing, having the required license allows Police to identify the owner and return the pet to their proper homes. Licenses available at City Hall for \$5.33 with proof of vaccinations.

**“Running at large prohibited.** It shall be unlawful for the dog or cat of any person who owns, harbors, or keeps a dog or cat, to run at large.”

**“Barking/Crying/Whining Dogs:** It shall be unlawful for any person to keep or harbor a dog which habitually barks or cries. Habitual barking is defined as barking for repeated intervals of at least five minutes with less than one minute of interruption.”

**“Cleaning up Litter:** The owner or custodian of any animal is responsible for cleaning up and disposing of any feces in a sanitary manner whether on their own property, on the property of others, or on public property.”

### VEHICLE VIOLATIONS

**“Abandoned Vehicle:** A vehicle that has remained illegally for a period of more than 48 hours on any property owned or controlled by a unit of government.”

**“Junk Vehicle:** (1) A vehicle that is extensively damaged, with damage including things such as broken or missing wheels, motor, drive train or transmission; (2) is apparently inoperable; (3) Does not have a valid, current registration plate.

The Nature Center is thriving! At the close of 2018, we had 4,075 visitors, and the gift shop sales, facility rentals and donations were more than double from the previous last three years!

Many requests for tourist information from MN Explorer were received, which shows interest from afar for our Trailhead Park and Nature Center, and our beautiful, scenic region.

Thanks to a generous donation from Karyl Droenen, a crew of 14-year-olds (Abigail Englund, Ken Grupe, Ethan Hargrove and Tanner Kubitz) were hired to help with maintenance of the Nature Center and Trailhead Park, with supervision by Brenda Grupe, Matt Kubly, and Roger Meyer.

Pat McAndrews and Ted Sennes of B&B Honey Farm, again provided an observation bee hive. This was a great attraction and provided in-depth discussion on animal social behaviors and use of chemicals in family gardens and farm fields.

Then there was the zip line! This new fun feature drew visitors from the entire region—from Twin Cities Metro to Central Iowa, Southcentral Minnesota to Northwestern Illinois!

Volunteers logged over 127 hours in assisting at the Center. However, this is a significant underestimate of the actual time devoted, since not everyone has tracked their hours.

Friends of Houston Nature Center held three very successful fundraiser events: Largest was the Rattlesnake Jubilee, a Wine and Appetizer Fundraiser hosted by Lynn and Roger Meyer and the Forget-Me-Not Garden Club in late January for the Nature Center, and also the International Owl Center/Nature Center partnered to bring in noted wildlife photographer Stan Tekiela to present a program on the Remarkable Woodpeckers.

### WINTER NATURE CENTER AND GIFT SHOP HOURS:

Monday, Friday and Saturday, 9:30—4:00 p.m.

**PARKS AND RECREATION**  
**Matt Schutte, Chair**  
**MISSION 66 PLAYGROUND PROJECT**

**It's a GO!**

**EXCITING ANNOUNCEMENT FROM MISSION 66 - It's HAPPENING!**  
**THE MISSION 66 PLAYGROUND WILL BE BUILT MAY 1-5, 2019!!!**

We are almost completely funded for this project and with your help, the rest will come soon!

This has been a community-wide effort from the planning to the construction and we are relying on Houston's continued support for the FINAL phase! Donations of money are always welcome, as well as equipment, tools, and your time and willing hands. Materials will soon be ordered and the site prepared so we are ready to go when May 1 comes. We ask for the help of our local individuals, businesses, non-profit organizations, churches and civic groups to help with the Build. We invite volunteers of all ages to participate, as there will be a job for everyone!

**Sign up for Build Week:** Please contact Audrey at City Hall to sign up to volunteer to help with Build Week—your help is much needed! Signing up will allow us to stay in contact with you during that busy time, but you are always welcome to come help at any time. When this wonderful Playground is complete, you'll be proud to say "I helped build this!"

**Loan us your Tools:** We need to provide our own power tools, etc. for the Build and need to borrow some! Especially called for are drill and router bits, saw blades, etc. See the equipment lists posted at businesses around town, Library, City Hall, on the Mission 66 web site ([www.houstonmission66.org/](http://www.houstonmission66.org/)) or Facebook Page (Mission 66 City of Houston).

**Buy a Fence Picket:** It's not too late! Order forms available at City Hall, on Mission 66 Facebook Page or Mission 66 web site. Great way to memorialize a loved one or show your support for the Playground! \$40 each or three for \$100. Order soon, as prices will go up March 1 due to time constraints.

**Buy a Commemorative Bench:** See example shown; large commemorative benches are available for purchase (\$500 for 6' bench) that will be inside the Playground.



**LIBRARY**  
**LIZ GIBSON-GASSET, Librarian**  
**BETH PETERSON-LEE, Assistant**

It's a new year out there -- and as it begins, your five Houston County Public Libraries are happy to announce an exciting new county-wide policy: *as of January 1st, 2019, children's books and audio books from our region will no longer accumulate overdue fees!*

The group decision was an easy one for the library directors from Caledonia, Hokah, Houston, La Crescent, and Spring Grove to make. Encouraging early literacy is one of our primary goals. Fines, no matter how small, can become barriers for young families, eventually preventing them from using our services. With this new initiative, we hope to welcome back parents and kids who may have avoided the library because of fines on their accounts, while continuing to build goodwill (and great reading skills!) within our communities.

As a result, we will also be waiving outstanding fines that were incurred on overdue children's books on current library accounts anytime in the past. Please note that this change does not apply to adult books or to movies for any age group. In addition, charges for lost or damaged items will still apply.

Questions? Give us a call at 896-READ or stop by the Houston Public Library during our regular hours of operation. We're delighted to start off the new year with such a positive change -- and hope you will be too!

# PROJECT UPDATES



**Water Treatment Facility Project:** The City’s current compliance agreement with the MN Department of Health states Radium levels will be reduced by year-end 2019. Iron and manganese will also be reduced by the new filtration system. Construction began on the treatment facility in November 2018. The total project cost is estimated at \$3.10 million.

**Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF):** The existing WWTF is well beyond its life expectancy. Bolton & Menk was hired in August 2016 to complete a Facility Report, the first step to getting on the MN Public Facility Authority funding list. The Facility Report was completed in February 2018 and analyzed options for improvements. The City Council authorized Bolton & Menk to move ahead with the design for the Rehabilitation Option, which has an estimated cost of \$1.5 to 2.5 million. The project will begin in 2019 or 2020, depending on funding.

**Highway 16 / MnDOT:** MnDOT has planned a Hwy 16 Mill & Overlay and partial Accessibility Improvements Project for year 2021. There has been discussion between MnDOT and the City regarding delaying that project a few years for planning a full reconstruction project to better improve drainage, ADA, and give the City a chance to replace the water main.

**Infrastructure:** Over the last couple of years, the City has repaired manholes in Hwy 16, extended water/sewer/street for nine residential lots in the Prairie Meadows Subdivision, extended sewer to Loken’s Sawmill Inn under an annexation agreement, and made improvements to Stoddard Street to provide vehicle access to a new Dollar General Store. The City has a priority list for street and utility reconstruction and is planning for another street reconstruction project to take place as soon as funds allow. Balancing investment in growth, maintenance of existing infrastructure, and tax rates is an ongoing process.

**The Community Center:** Significant repairs and upgrades are needed at the Houston Community Center. The City Council has voted in favor of researching the options for a new building. Grants and private donations will be key to moving this project forward. Current efforts include a group of citizens exploring the idea of starting a Community Foundation to raise funds.

**OHV Project:** A partnership between the MN DNR, user clubs and the City of Houston has obtained grants to purchase land for a proposed Off-Highway Vehicle Project. A local advisory committee has met several times to develop a list of project goals and advise the City on options for administration, inspection, maintenance, and oversight of the Trail system. A proposed design option for trails is currently under review at the MN DNR. The project would follow the guidelines of the DNR Grants-in Aid Program, as outlined at: [http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/assistance/grants/recreation/ohv/program\\_manual.pdf](http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/assistance/grants/recreation/ohv/program_manual.pdf).

**Flood Levee Recertification:** The City’s Flood Levee Consultant Mead & Hunt has completed most of the analysis to recertify the Flood Levee. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has required additional analysis on the east side of town in connection with the South Fork Root River Floodplain.

# CITY FINANCES

Property taxes are the main source of revenue for the City. The City Levy is set in December of each year and is based on the proposed budget for the following year. The Property Tax Levy to be collected in 2019 shows which funds receive full or partial revenue from property taxes. City funds that are not listed are mostly self-supported from user fees, donations, or grants. Those funds include the Water/Sewer, Ambulance, Ballfield, OHV, and Mission 66 Playground. See next page for the adopted 2019 General Fund Budget.

PROPERTY TAX LEVY, COLLECTABLE 2019	
GENERAL FUND	221,815
LIBRARY FUND	37,275
FIRE FUND	50,000
PARK/REC FUND	5,000
NATURE CENTER FUND	38,000
INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRUCTION	50,000
2011 SHERMAN STREET BOND	58,000
2016 ELLSWORTH STREET BOND	10,000
2017 STREET & UTILITY BOND	10,000
VEHICLE FUND	17,000
TOTAL LEVY	497,090

<b>2019 GENERAL FUND BUDGET</b>	
<u>GENERAL FUND REVENUES</u>	
Property Tax	221,815
MN Local Government Aid	362,373
Business Licenses	1,400
Permits - General	300
Building Permits	3,000
Animal Licenses	200
Police Aid	14,000
City Hall Rent	2,500
Court Fines	1,000
Refunds & Reimb	5,000
Penalties	2,500
Donations	1,220
<b>Total General Fund Revenue</b>	<b>615,308</b>

<u>GENERAL FUND - ADMIN EXPENSES</u>	
Council	8,800
Wages (70% 1FT, 2 PT)	87,603
FICA & Medicare	6,702
Retirement	6,570
Health/Life/Dis. Insurance	4,800
Worker's Comp Ins.	1,000
Liability Ins.	5,250
Admin Office	9,000
Admin Office Utilities	8,900
Legal Notices / Fees	13,000
Software/IT/Cell	5,000
Supplies/Repair	1,800
Training/Travel/Dues	2,650
Audit - Admin	12,000
Misc.	1,050
Economic Development	11,879
<b>Total Admin Expenses</b>	<b>186,004</b>

<u>GENERAL FUND - COMMUNITY CENTER EXPENSES</u>	
Wages (PT custodian all bldgs.)	16,575
FICA & Medicare	1,268
Retirement	1,243
Worker's Comp Ins.	1,000
Supplies/Repair	6,200
Utilities	7,300
Liability Ins.	2,500
Misc.	100
<b>Total Community Center Expenses</b>	<b>36,186</b>

<u>GENERAL FUND - POLICE EXPENSES</u>	
Wages (2FT, 1 PT)	130,000
Medicare	1,885
Retirement	22,035
Health/Life/Dis. Insurance	16,288
Worker's Comp Ins.	6,000
Liability Ins.	5,000
Motor Fuels	8,000
Legal Fees	10,000
Software/IT/Cell	2,450
Supplies/Repairs	6,300
Personal Gear	1,500
Training/Travel/Dues	3,500
Animal Control	3,000
Misc.	1,000
<b>Total Police Expenses</b>	<b>216,958</b>

<u>GENERAL FUND - PUBLIC WORKS EXPENSES</u>	
Wages (33% of 2FT, Seasonal PT)	36,440
FICA & Medicare	2,788
Retirement	2,733
Health/Life/Dis. Insurance	25,000
Worker's Comp Ins.	7,000
Liability Ins.	11,100
Personal Gear	800
Office Utilities	430
Motor Fuels	7,100
Street Maintenance	11,000
Supplies/Repair	3,000
Training	50
Flood Control - pumping	3,100
Streets - Snow	3,000
Street and Park Lights - Elect	19,000
Parks Repairs/Supplies	3,600
Misc.	3,250
<b>Total Public Works Expenses</b>	<b>139,391</b>
(water and sewer expenses not included)	

<u>BUILDING PERMIT EXPENSES</u>	
<b>Total Permit Expenses (CMS)</b>	<b>3,500</b>

<b>UNASSIGNED</b>	<b>33,269</b>
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## BUILDING INSPECTOR AND PERMITS

**BUILDING INSPECTOR:** The City of Houston is looking to hire our own Residential Building Inspector. Candidates must meet the criteria to take the MN Building Official Limited Exam. A condition of employment will be to pass the exam within six months of hire. Applications will be accepted until position is filled, with the first review of applications taking place on March 15, 2019. The certification prerequisites can be found at: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/1301.0300/>

**BUILDING PERMITS:** An owner who intends to construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, demolish, or change the occupancy of a building or structure, or to erect, install, enlarge, alter, repair, remove, convert, or replace any gas, mechanical, electrical, plumbing system, or other equipment, the installation of which is regulated by the code; or cause any such work to be done, shall first make application for permit. The City of Houston will review all permit applications for compliance with zoning. The City contracts with CMS Inspections to review and inspect projects for compliance with the building code. Permits for electrical must be arranged through the MN State Electrical Inspector.

Please stop at City Hall or go to the Building/Zoning tab on the City website for more information.

**FENCE PERMITS:** All fences over 30" need a permit (no fee unless the fence is over 6' in height). A few of the residential rules are listed below. Please find the full fence permit form and rules at City Hall or on the website:

- No fence or wall shall be constructed of any electrically charged element or barbed wire. Chained link fence is prohibited in residential front yards.
- No fence or wall located in a side or a rear yard shall be of height exceeding six feet.
- No fence or wall located in a front yard shall be of height exceeding 42 inches.
- No fence may be located less than 18 inches from a property line unless the adjacent property owner agrees to a lesser setback.
- No fence, wall, hedge or other screening device shall be permitted to encroach on any public right-of-way.

## CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

***HAPPY NEW YEAR from your Houston Area Chamber of Commerce!*** With the arrival of the new year, we want to take a moment to reflect on our accomplishments, and thank our amazing volunteers and our supportive business community. None of what we have achieved would be possible without you - thank you! In 2018 we:

- Kept our community and our businesses informed about local items of interest through our quarterly email newsletter, our website, our Facebook page, and our online community calendar.
- Developed a new promotional brochure for the City of Houston.
- Coordinated the welcoming of large tour groups and new residents to the area, providing information about our community and referrals to our member businesses.
- Provided tailored business development services
- Received a SEMAC Small Towns Grant for Houston's Lawn Chair Concert Series.
- Coordinated promotion and event organizing for several local events: 60-Mile Garage Sale, Lawn Chair Concert Series, Hoe-down Craft Beer Tent, First Annual Houston Block Party, Business Trick-or-Treat, and our Holiday Lights decorating contest.

Make sure to check out the Chamber website to see a list of our local businesses. Houston is fortunate to have so many products and services available right here in the community. Please show your support and shop local.

Let's Stay Connected! **Website:** [www.houstonmnchamber.com](http://www.houstonmnchamber.com)—**Facebook:** Houston Area Chamber of Commerce—**Contact us:** [houstonmnchamber@gmail.com](mailto:houstonmnchamber@gmail.com) of 507-896-4033, Ext. 6.

**THANK YOU from the Chamber Board:** Chris Schroeder, President; Rod Torgerson, Vice President; Nancy Forsyth, Treasurer; Ron Evenson, Board Member; John Evenson, Board Member, and Sarah Wexler-Mann, Director.

**HOUSTON CITY HALL  
105 W. MAPLE, PO BOX 667  
HOUSTON, MN 55943**

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NEWSLETTER**

## **CITY HALL**

**507-896-4033**

### HOURS

Monday 9-4  
Tuesday 9-4  
Wednesday 9-4  
Thursday 9-4  
Friday 9-4

## **POLICE**

For non-emergencies call  
507-896-3076 or Houston  
County Dispatch at 507-725-  
3379. For emergencies,  
call 911.

## **NATURE CTR**

**507-896-4668**

### WINTER HOURS

Monday 9:30-4  
Tuesday Closed \*  
Wednesday Closed \*  
Thursday Closed \*  
Friday 9:30-4  
Saturday 9:30-4  
Sunday \*

\*Except for special programs

## **LIBRARY**

**507-896-7323**

### HOURS

Monday 2-8  
Tuesday 2-8  
Wednesday 9-1  
Thursday 10-8  
Friday Closed  
Saturday 10-4  
Sunday Closed