THE WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT (WWTP)

At the September 14, 2020, Council meeting an agenda item was posted by Development Services to submit an application for a Community Development Block Grant – MIT to finance the abandonment of our wastewater treatment plant (WWTP).

Interim City Manager Brant Gary went into more detail at the October 5th Council meeting. The premise of the grant is to provide flood mitigation to Bellaire by providing flood detention in the current Public Works area along Edith Street. The size of the area has not been determined.
If approved, the $60 to $65 million dollar grant would be a years-long project, and completely change our Public Works Department. It would do away with our WWTP and move all wastewater treatment to the City of Houston's Almeda Sims WWTP.

A lift station and an eight to nine mile-long pipeline would be built from Bellaire to the Almeda Sims plant to facilitate the change, for the use of Bellaire and Houston. The City of Bellaire would be reliant on the City of Houston and pay for the wastewater treatment based on usage.

Brant Gary explained that Bellaire would not qualify for the grant, which includes requirements for benefits to low to moderate income areas, without partnering with the City of Houston. It's obvious that considerable input from the City of Houston for the preparation of this grant has been required.

Houston would would benefit from the grant by upgrades to their system and assistance with the pipeline and lift stations once the Houston WWTP on Beechnut is abandoned.

Maintenance of the City's lift stations and all equipment and sewer lines within the city would remain Bellaire's responsibility, and City personnel would still be required to oversee operations. The cost to reclaim the Public works area and remediate as necessary would be borne by Bellaire and is not included in the grant.

The grant would provide funds to relocate the Public Works operations, including the cost of land, a new Public Works building and operations building, storage and shops, and space for all Public Works equipment.
The cost to the City of Bellaire would be 1% of the grant funding, somewhere in the neighborhood of $650,000. Some members of City Council seemed to believe it was too good to pass up. The mayor sees a return of 99 to 1. Another Council member suggested that demolishing the WWTP would improve quality of life for residents in that area. But another questioned the wisdom of losing our WWTP and relying solely on Houston. The City would have few options if the Houston costs increased.

The Interim City Manager listed several small cities as linking to Houston's WWTP, the largest being Galena Park with a population around 11,000 residents. However, Galena Park has it's own WWTP and has no intention of connecting to Houston's, though about 340 homes in one subdivision are connected to Houston's WWTP. Spring Valley has a population of 4,300, and Hillshire Village, the third city mentioned, has a population of 819. Presently Bellaire residents pay a monthly fee of $3.18 per thousand gallons, but no cost benefits or comparisons for wastewater treatment were available at that meeting.

Should the grant application be approved it will be up to City Council to accept or reject it. Regardless, the City would have to continue to pay down the $7.5 million dollar debt for the bonds that were approved in 2016 to renovate the WWTP. Find the October 5, 2020 CDBG presentation here.