December 9, 2024

Dear Mayor and members of Bellaire City Council,

As most of you may know, for several reasons I am not in favor of demolishing our wastewater treatment plant. Part of that is just the thought of reliance on the City of Houston for wastewater treatment and the increase in cost for Bellaire residents, unless the City of Houston is offering a special price that is much lower than the costs for residents of Houston.

There is the embarrassment of a City that cannot afford to maintain a very important facility. Bellaire is currently renting a building in Houston to house the Public Works personnel, because there is no funding for a new building. What's next, sell off our vehicles, lay off workers, and issue contracts to an outside vendor for trash and recycling pickup?

There is the matter of Bellaire's bonded debt, at present around $92 million dollars, which currently costs $9.5 million a year just for debt service. Now Council is facing another $70 million for additional debt. For bonded debt that we are assured may not occur for years. On the other hand, those bonds could be marketed in a few months. Good grief.

Bellaire's main attractions are our schools and the fact that we are not part of Houston. Not our parks, our business centers, cafes, and cute boutiques – the ones that were promised in H-E-B/Spruce area. We cannot predict where the economy may go in the next few years. Property values, which translate to property tax revenue, can stagnate or even decline. Beware of the decisions you make.

My sense is that someone had better get a handle on the City's finances. The City currently has 196 employees, up from 181 just ten years ago. Why? I know we have a large number of employees in the Police and Fire Departments, but Bellaire seems to farm out most City maintenance, so why the increase in personnel? Consider cross-training and part-time instead of full-time, downsize the number of personnel or do not replace someone when they leave.

Focus on our main parks, Loftin, Evelyn's, Nature Discovery, Evergreen, and abandon others that are under-utilized. Insist on proper maintenance of vehicles and buildings, including maintenance logs. Everything from oil changes to HVAC filters.

Back to my main concern – our WWTP. I feel it would be huge loss to Bellaire, on several levels. There's already $8 million worth of equipment that was installed in 2017. Find a company that knows how to rehab these plants and then contract to rebuild the plant in stages. Whatever you do, please do not allow this plant to be demolished,

Thank you,

Jane McNeel