

Rhome Record

January – 2024



Happy New Year Rhome Friends!

The City Council and Staff team wish you a happy 2024 and would like to take a moment to look back on some of the great things that have been accomplished in the past year for Rhome. Staff and Council have been very busy and while we cannot list everything here, we hope you enjoy this look-back as we prepare for all the good things coming to Rhome in the New Year.

Communications and Engagement

- We increased our social media postings to help keep our community informed. Added over 100 new subscribers and created a wider reach for our news.
- Conducted a citizen survey and presented the results to Council for future planning.
- We updated the City's website to promote transparency and information for the public. Added several new documents and tabs for elections, budgets, taxes/tax rates, and created an area to post all Council presentations.
- Rebranded our newsletter and are offering it by print, online and emailed versions.

Budget & Financial Forecasting

- We conducted an in-depth analysis of revenue and expenditures for the City. This will help us better predict revenue and expenditures for the annual budget.
- Engaged an independent Certified Public Accountant (CPA) to prepare audit workpapers for our FY 2022 audit.
- Part of our analysis included a review of our sales and use tax data to clearly identify how the city's revenue was being shared with Wise County and the financial impact to Rhome. We will continue to explore all of our options in partnering with the County and ensuring the City is receiving all available revenue and benefits.
- Staff also created a list of benchmark cities for Council to gauge our progress in service delivery as well as draw data from for personnel comparisons and other metrics.
- Council reviewed the remaining American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and allocated the funds to important City services, projects, and equipment purchases.
- Finished the deep dive audit of the financial system/records with our independent consultant team. This was an extensive project to align our financial systems with our bank reconciliation system as well as our annual budget. The work allowed us to calculate the funds the City has in reserves, determine the approximate cost per day to fund city operations, segregated restricted funds into the correct accounts, established fixed assets, fully implemented consolidated cash, created new general ledger codes to track expenditures and revenues, and aligned all of this within our financial system.
- Reworked the entire budget document to expand the level of information for enhanced transparency and accountability. We moved from a simple line-item budget document to one that also provides explanations for city services and goals/objectives for the next year.

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Budget & Financial Forecasting, continued...

- Also, performed a historical compilation of revenue/expenditures for the past three (3) years to move toward preparing a five-year financial forecast.
- As part of the budget process, staff completed a salary survey for all positions within the city to establish pay ranges for each position.
- Council had staff publish all budget information on the website and asked that the information be cross posted on social media to help open the processes and decisions to our stakeholders.

Infrastructure Needs – Water, Sewer (Wastewater), and Electricity

- A great accomplishment was the finalization of a contract extension with Walnut Creek Special Utility District (WCSUD) for Rhome to receive water! Our current contract was set to expire in 2024 and we were able to extend it for our water supply through October of 2029. Council will be looking at all of our options to either extend our agreement with WCSUD past 2029, to work toward re-drilling our existing wells to help with water and/or to explore options to secure another water supplier. Water is a precious commodity for the region!
- Through Council Member Shumake – Staff met with representatives from the Trinity River Authority (TRA) staff to determine if a partnership opportunity existed for sewer services. This project may be 10 years in the works; however, we are looking at all options to make sure we can serve our community for many years to come.
- Staff members also spoke with the developer of Rolling V Ranch (RVR) to discuss a partnership to upgrade the West Wastewater Treatment Plant. While we weren't able to come to an agreement, we explore all options for public/private partnerships to benefit the community.
- Council closely monitored the proposed Oncor transmission lines that will run from the Ramhorn Hill switching station and run east out of Rhome toward I-35 West. As of the publication of this newsletter, it appears as if the line location will go well south of the main area of Rhome and thus, limit the negative impact on our community.
- Staff also compiled an overview of our water and wastewater system to prioritize the projects we need to work on first to benefit Rhome. Some of those issues involve the West Wastewater Treatment Plant and the old clay pipes that run through some of our older parts of town.
- Council and Staff members attended regional meetings with Aurora, Boyd, Paradise, Newark, and New Fairview representatives to discuss ways we could share municipal resources and our future water needs for the region. The regional approach may help us keep costs down, identify ways we can partner on projects, and to evaluate interlocal agreements for services.

Records Management and City Documents

- Council approved a Records Management Plan for Rhome! This sets retention dates for all the city records so that we can comply with state requirements.
- Staff have scanned several boxes of documents to help ensure we have continuity of business if we went through a natural disaster.
- Staff also cleaned out old municipal court case files from under the water tower and are now focusing on finishing out organizing and scanning the remaining old documents we have on hand. Great first step for our historical records and helping keep our information safe!

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Departmental Accomplishments

Fire – EMS:

- The Fire Department inventoried the old fire engines and other apparatus which was stored behind the building and auctioned the equipment through a third-party service. We raised approximately \$15,000 from the sale that was used to purchase equipment for the department.
- Through a grant that we received from the Texas Forest Service and the sale of the old brush truck, the department was able to purchase a brand-new brush truck and a skid unit for the community! We were very glad to secure such a unit for Rhome and to leverage grant opportunities to help lower the cost to our community.
- Staff had repairs completed on both Engine 317 and 217 so they would comply with the pumping levels and the National Fire Prevention Association standards. They also purchased new hoses and nozzles for fire safety.
- Council approved two (2) new positions for full-time firefighters to make sure we had at least one paid employee on each shift. The goal is to increase our public safety efforts and be ready for a fire or medical emergency.
- With a budget allocation of \$50,000, the department had some much needed repairs made to the station: installed a new ceiling in the bunkroom to keep vermin out of the sleeping quarters, updated the electrical in the living quarters to comply with code requirements, replaced the old refrigerators with donations from Lowe's and businesses in Rhome, installed a modified kitchen area in the dayroom, installed indoor/outdoor carpet, and personal lockers in the sleeping quarters for staff. These updates made a very big impact for our staff team and volunteers!

Police Department:

- The department began an interlocal agreement to provide police services to the city of Aurora. The contract currently provides additional revenue to the city and allows us to partner with a neighboring city to enhance safety and security for our area.
- The city received the four (4) new police Tahoe's that were ordered several months ago to replace the old units which were being used for patrol. The city was able to enter into a public/private partnership with the developer of PMB to purchase one (1) of the Tahoe units and thus reduce the cost for all the vehicles for the city.
- The department also received funds to purchase ballistic shields through a state grant. These will help keep our staff members safer while they are working on behalf of the community.
- Police was also given a budget allocation of \$50,000 to make repairs to the building. Some of the work included: removal of old items stored in the attic area, added additional insulation to the attic to help with the utility bills and the issues with the heating and cooling, they shored up the skirting around the building to keep the raccoons and skunks from gaining access to the underside, replaced the front door, added new signage to identify the building, and partnered with other departments to chip seal the parking lots.
- The police team were also involved in numerous community and safety events – Cones with a Cop, badge pinning ceremonies, 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb, Aurora City Hall grand opening, taught a course on "civilian responses to active shooter events", hosted National Night Out – all in addition to their normal patrol and public safety related duties.

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Departmental Accomplishments, continued...

Public Works:

- The public works team worked on several projects this year: repaired valves at our BOBO pump station, replaced lift pumps at the West Wastewater Treatment Plant, replaced well booster pumps for Well #5, and replaced the pumps for the wastewater lift station near Love's.
- They replaced the SCADA systems that help control and monitor our water usage.
- The team repaired drainage issues in various areas of town and worked with a contractor to address a significant draining problem in Ellis.
- The roads in Ellis Homestead were chip sealed through an interlocal agreement with Wise County to help preserve and maintain this area.
- The department successfully passed a TCEQ water audit in January of 2023.
- And one of the most important accomplishments, was their hard work to help ensure we did not run out of water and need boil notices during the Stage 3 water restrictions that were imposed by Walnut Creek Special Utility District.

Administration:

- We are pleased to have filled two (2) of our department head positions – Fire Chief and Public Works Director – this past year.
- The admin team also scanned thousands of vital records into our electronic database to make sure we were maximizing our technology use and dealing with space constraints as well as digitizing the records so that they could be maintained in the future.
- Council authorized the use of Archive Social to meet our legal requirements to maintain all of our social media sites and comply with any open records requests.
- Council also set specific dates to review our capital planning needs, to begin working on updating the vision, values, and mission statements for the community, scheduled a budget retreat for the next fiscal year, and dedicated time for orientation discussions for incoming (new) council members for the next election cycle. This will help us set a firm foundation for the governance and visioning needs of Rhome!

Important Dates to Remember:

- ✓ City Hall Closing at Noon, Wednesday, January 17th for Staff Training

Meetings at the Marie Moore Educational Center (Community Center next to the Fire Dept.)

- ✓ Planning & Zoning – Cancelled for January
- ✓ Regular Council Meeting(s) – January 11th and 25th at 6:00 p.m.
- ✓ Council Meeting – Goals/Vision/Capital Planning Retreat – January 19th at 9:00 a.m.

Electronic Newsletter Option:

If you would prefer an electronic version of the newsletter, please email us at cityadministrator@cityofrhome.com with the email address you would like us to send it to each time we publish.