

Water Utilities

After 40 years, Richard Foust has retired as Water Utility General Manager. An interesting display of photos and articles was prepared by the Water Department staff for his retirement event held at the Giovannetti Community Shelter last fall. Some materials from the Historical Society archives were included.

Foust in 1980 had prepared a paper outlining some of the history of the water department services to Urbandale residents. Here are some of the details from that account.

When Urbandale was incorporated in 1917, it was considered just a rural community northwest of Des Moines with many of its residents engaged in agriculture and coal mining activities. During these early days, families had individual wells which served as the water supply. During the early 1930's some of the wells were being pumped dry resulting in the need for residents to carry water from the Allyn Hazen water tower owned by the Des Moines Water Works located at 48th and Hickman. This is approximately 2 ½ miles from the city of Urbandale. Many of the local residents believed this was just a temporary problem and their wells would replenish themselves in the future and continue to furnish an adequate supply of water. As a result from 1930-1934 the residents twice rejected proposals to establish an extension of the water line from Des Moines to provide a public water supply to the city.

According to an account by Mae Nelson, a third vote was set up for July 4, 1934. The P.T.A. mothers became involved because there just wasn't enough water for the school and businesses on Monday morning when folks were traditionally

doing the family wash. The women put up a tent near the voting place and passed out information sheets. The final count was 226 to 104 in favor of obtaining water from the Des Moines system. A 6 inch main was to be connected to the Des Moines main as a W.P.A. project.

This project proceeded with the necessary extension and connection for 50 homes. Installation of water to the homes was to be at the owners expense estimated at \$20.00 each. Twenty six fire hydrants were installed, water meters were set and new water lines were tested. On September 13th the city had a public water system for a total of 4.6 miles of distribution.

The acquisition of water played an important role in the development of the city. The growth rate of the city was comparatively slow up to 1950, both in population and physical expansion of the water system – approximately 60 persons a year reaching a population in 1950 of 1,777. But by 1947 there was already an inclination that the distribution system was starting to experience a strain due to the number of customers the system was serving. Lyle Cunningham, Ralph Whitten and Nelson Dunn were familiar names serving on the Water Board.

The decision was made to replace some of the small mains originally installed in 1934 with larger mains. This insured the flow and pressure that were being reduced by the increasing number of persons using the water supply. With the completion of this work the system was again adequate.

During the 1950's the city then experienced its start of a large population growth and there was a new demand for water service. This resulted in a turning point regarding the attitude of the Water

Board toward Water Department operation and the design of the system. Emphasis was being placed on planning and future projects regarding customer needs, rather than just keeping up with demands. A new 12" feeder main was completed from Merle Hay to 72nd and Aurora which was laid by Towers Brothers, an Urbandale construction firm. A 500,000 gallon storage facility was constructed with funds from revenue bonds.

When the city hall went to the new building at 70th and Roseland, the water office went to 68th and Douglas where it stayed until January 1967. At that time it moved to 7006 Madison. According to Les Hamilton the water board members in 1967 included Ed Petty, Lloyd McLean and Joseph Kenworthy. Workmen were Frank McCutcheon and Roy Avaux, and Mrs. Homer Bible and Mrs. Avaux were the office employees.

In 1960 projections were made regarding future growth patterns of the city including population, land use, and city boundary lines. A proposed industrial park was located on the city's northwest boundary. Revenue bonds were used to help finance a main now extending from 72nd and Aurora to 104th Street and Douglas.

There was now much increased domestic use along with industrial and commercial use. For example, the per capita use per day had averaged 47.5 gallons per day but by 1971 the figures had increased to 70.5 gallons per day per capita.

In the 1970's contracts for several water system improvements were made including an additional connection to the Des Moines system at Merle Hay, a booster station at 104th and Dennis Drive, and a 1,000,000 gallon elevated

storage tank to provide increased pressure and flow to handle growth and adequate fire protection for the Industrial Park and westward expansion.

Though water usage has increased dramatically over 80 years, the Urbandale Water Department has made continual improvement. Urbandale's Capital Improvement Plan for 2014-2019 includes proposals to install larger water mains to improve capacity and reduce repair costs, and to install new water mains to accommodate development.

The Urbandale Water Board of Trustees have approved plans for work on some portion of 71st, 72nd, Douglas Avenue, Oliver Smith, 100th, Northpark Drive, Meredith Drive, Monroe Court, Oakbrook, 83rd, and Deer Creek. The Water Utility and Department of Engineering and Public Works will coordinate the timing of projects over the years to minimize disruption.

Additionally the 114th Street water tower will be repainted and enhanced with security fencing and lighting. Some existing 4 inch mains in the system will be replaced with 8 inch mains to improve flow and service. A 16 inch water main will be installed along Meredith Drive from 132nd to 142nd Street as Urbandale's boundaries have pushed westward.

The Urbandale Water Utility is currently located at 3720 86th Street. The Urbandale Water Board of Trustees, with new manager Dale Acheson, oversees an operating budget of over 16 million dollars. From its humble beginnings the Water Utility Board continues to plan to serve Urbandale's growing population, estimated in 2012 to be more than 40,000 people.