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The Hartselle



Serving Hartselle's People, Building for Hartselle's Future

Hartselle Leaders Go to Washington

In mid-February, representatives from Hartselle and Morgan County traveled to Washington, DC to ask members of the U.S. House and Senate for help in obtaining federal funding for several high-priority community projects. The group included officials from Hartselle Utilities, Hartselle City Government, Morgan County District 2, Hartselle Chamber of Commerce, Hartselle Development Board, Morgan County Economic Development Association, Hartselle Transportation Committee, and NARCOG. State Senator Arthur Orr also accompanied the group.

Over a two-day period, the Hartselle delegation met with Sen. Jeff Sessions, Rep. Bud Cramer, Rep. Robert Aderholt, and the staff from Sen. Richard Shelby's office. Sen. Shelby had a last-minute committee meeting and was unable to attend the meeting.

The 2008 Hartselle Federal Legislative Agenda presented by the group listed twelve separate projects. The top priorities, according to Mayor Dwight Tankersley, are transportation projects for Highway 36 and Thompson Road; a city-wide wireless network; the HU wastewater treatment plant (*see story on next page*); expansion and improvements to the Industrial Park; and streetscaping for downtown.

It is important, says Mayor Tankersley, for local delegations to travel to Washington. "If you don't ask in person, your chances of getting a particular project funded are not very good," he explains. "They want to know

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Officials from Hartselle met Sen. Richard Shelby's staff to ask for assistance in securing federal funding for several community projects. Pictured, from bottom left, are Bob Francis, Chairman, Hartselle Development Board; Allison Ross, Vice President, Morgan County Economic Development Association; Dewayne Hellums, Director, Transportation Planning for NARCOG; Mark Mizzel, City Council Member; Dwight Tankersley, Mayor, City of Hartselle; Greg Polley, Legislative Assistant for Senator Richard Shelby; Susan Hines, President, Hartselle Area Chamber of Commerce; Alabama State Sen. Arthur Orr; Ken Livingston, Morgan County Commissioner, District 2

Rates Increase for Sewer System Customers

Effective April 1, sanitary sewer rates for Hartselle Utilities customers will increase. For the average HU customer, based on 5,000 gallons of sewer volume per month, the average monthly sewer bill will increase from \$29.15 to \$35.46, says HU Accounting & Finance Manager Bob Sittason. Two portions of the rate will be affected, says Sittason. The base rate will increase from \$11.25 per month to \$12.71, and the volume rate will increase from \$3.58 per 1,000 gallons of water used to \$4.55 per 1,000 gallons.

"The rate increase is necessary for us to cover the costs of ongoing operating expenses, capital improvements, and debt repayments," says HU General Manager Ferrell Vest. "We postponed the rate increase as long as we could, and are thankful that, because of the assistance from federal grants, it wasn't higher."

In 2002, HU began an aggressive sewer rehabilitation program to correct inflow and infiltration (I/I) problems into the system, Vest says.

"The problem had become so severe that HU was mandated to fix I/I," Vest says, explaining that HU was under a consent order from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM). "Otherwise, we would have been faced with substantial

finances – at customer expense – each time the system overflowed."

The overall project cost just over \$5 million, and HU was able to secure grants from the federal government for about 55 percent of that, Sittason says. HU participates in annual trips to Washington DC (*see related story*) to request funding for high-priority community projects.

"Had we not asked for the money from the federal government," Vest says, "we would not have received the grants. We still would have had to correct the problems in the sewer system, but our customers would have had to directly foot the bill for the entire project."

The remainder of the money to pay for the sewer rehabilitation project came from HU existing funds and low-cost loans from the Alabama State Revolving Fund (SRF). Repayments on the SRF loans began this year, prompting HU to commission the rate study by a private engineering firm, CDG Engineers & Associates.

CDG advised that HU's current revenue from its sewer system is not enough to cover operating expenses, pay for capital improvements and repay the SRF loans, and recommended that the board raise sewer rates. In late January, the board adopted the firm's recommendations.

HU Asks for Federal Funds for Wastewater Treatment Plant

A group of officials from Hartselle recently traveled to Washington, DC to present the community's 2008 Legislative Agenda to members of Congress. HU General Manager Ferrell Vest and Board Chairman Mike Gunter were members of the delegation, and asked Congressional delegates and their staffs for help in obtaining federal funds to rehab and expand HU's 20-year-old wastewater treatment plant.

"When we first began correcting the problems in our sewer system," Vest says, "we divided the project into four phases. We've completed almost all of phases 1, 2, and 3. Phase 4 is the wastewater treatment plant."

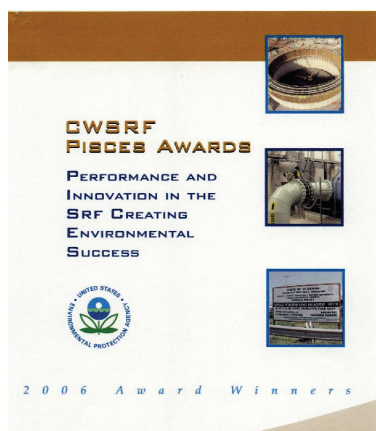
Recent additions to the wastewater treatment plant, along with the investments the utility made to decrease inflow and infiltrations (I/I) into the sewer system increased efficiencies at the plant, but "the efficiency of the plant is still not what it should be – it is a 20-year-old plant," Vest says. "This affects the quality of the water that comes out of the plant, and we need to rehab the plant so we can continue to meet ADEM and EPA regulations."

In addition, he says, to handle current and future growth in Hartselle, HU will need additional capacity at the wastewater treatment plant.

Vest says HU hopes to receive \$2.4 million in federal funds for work on the wastewater treatment plant.

HU Wins National Award

HU has received the national PISCES award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for making improvements to its sewer system. The PISCES, which stands for "Performance and Innovation in the SRF Creating Environmental Success," recognizes "systems that achieve significant environmental and economic benefits with an innovative and effective project," according to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, which nominated HU for the award.



Under the SRF program, ADEM loaned HU \$2.93 million to address inflow and infiltration (I/I) problems in its sewer system. The improvements resulted in a 20 percent reduction in I/I leaks into the system.

"We are pleased to offer programs that provide much needed assistance to local governments to help water and wastewater treatment systems," said ADEM Director Trey Glenn. "I commend Hartselle Utilities for winning this award and I am pleased that these improvements advance ADEM's goals for water quality protection and safeguarding the environment."

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what your needs are and that all in the community support a project."

"When we present a funding request," Mayor Tankersley says, "one of the first questions from the delegation is always 'Do you have community support for this?'. Having such a large group of people, from different organizations, in the room with you answers that question." He continues, "The trips to Washington are very good for our community. It is important that we show a united front to our Congressional delegation."

Since the trip, Mayor Tankersley has been notified that two projects from the Hartselle Legislative Agenda will receive funding: \$150,000 from the Federal Aviation Administration for new airport runway lights, and \$100,000 from FEMA to purchase equipment for the Hartselle Fire Department.

Electric System Study Underway

Over the next few months, contractors will review every part of the HU electric system, says HU Electric Superintendent Doug Keel. "This system-wide study will be the basis for our planning for the next five years," Keel says. "It will give us a road map for addressing the electrical concerns of Hartselle."

The last electric system study was done in 1992, Keel says. The recommended changes in that report, which included HU's new substation and modifications to wire sizes, transformers and other equipment, have been completed.

Over the next several months, employees from Stewart Engineering will conduct a field check of the system, looking at the size, capacity and locations of the existing substations, transmission lines, distribution lines, transformers, conductors and other equipment. They will also review voltage drops and load flow data and make projections for the next five years.

"Using our billing history," Keel says, "they will figure what capacities are there, and tell us what we need to have in the coming years."

HU plans to start conducting system-wide studies every five years.

New Business Development Coming

The next few months will bring several construction projects to Hartselle. New businesses being built along Highway 31 include a Captain D's, Walgreens, Guthrie's, an automated car wash and a new gym. Redstone Federal Credit Union is building a new office on Highway 36. Several businesses, including Taco Bell and O'Reilly's Auto Parts, are building new buildings as well.

"The construction is a positive sign for our tax base," says Mayor Dwight Tankersley, "and will bring a significant number of new jobs to Hartselle."

The city has also purchased 19 acres along Highway 36, east of I-65. According to Mayor Tankersley, Hartselle is seeking to partner with a commercial developer for possibly either retail or restaurant use for the property. The City Council has voted to make sewer lines available to the property and provided the funds to do so. HU will manage the project on behalf of the city.



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