

Public Works Director Outlines Infrastructure Improvements

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Public Works Director Paul Toor called his tenure in South Pasadena “nothing but excitement” in overseeing what he called “the most aggressive capital infrastructure replacement program in the history of the city” as he has embarked on \$60 million in projects over the past four years.

Speaking to about 40 members of Women Involved in South Pasadena Political Action (WISPPA) and guests Saturday, Toor explained that after the city sold bonds in 2009 it was struggling to get projects delivered. Many were extremely complex, such as fixing the city’s water reservoir system because it required “knowing how to keep the water running at the same time” the tank was being fixed.

Most of the projects involve water and sewer repairs that were long overdue given the city’s century-old systems, but street repairs have also been a priority, with the council spending about \$2 million per year on that effort alone.

Water System

Our city's forefathers purchased our water system, which draws water from the San Gabriel Basin. "We are sort of on the edge of that," Toor said, which means that we have pipelines and five city reservoirs to store the water that is pumped from the aquifer several miles away.

What's next? Repairs of more of the water lines themselves, which are 60 to 80 years old, and seeking more funding from the state to repair the three reservoirs still in line for repairs. Bond funds paid to repair the first two reservoirs: Wilson is fixed and Garfield is scheduled to be finished next June. As one repair is finished, the goal is to roll out the next one, he added.

There are some immediate benefits, such as making our reservoirs seismically safe to prevent massive flooding in the event of an earthquake. Also, there may be solar panels on top of our reservoirs at some point, Toor said.



City Public Works Director

Paul Toor, center, provided an update on public works projects and financing in South Pasadena at the August 6 meeting of Women Involved in South Pasadena Political Action (WISPPA). He also introduced Kristine Courdy, right, a civil engineer who has been with the City for approximately five months as the City's new Public Works operations manager. From left are Carrie Adrian, chair, city's Finance Commission; Paul Toor, public works director; Ellen Daigle, WISPPA vice-president, who introduced Toor; and Kristine Courdy, Public Works Operations Manager. PHOTO BY SALLY KILBY

Sewer System

“Back in 2007, we had some issues with the sewers because the pipes are getting old, and we were having an excessive number of spills,” Toor said. This led to fines of about \$2 million that were reduced to about \$200,000 through a consent decree requiring a sewer repair timetable. We have 58 miles of sewer lines in our city, and 20 miles of them had to be repaired within two years. That work has been completed and the city is now working on Phase 2, which involves 50% of the sewers. For this work, the city has received an \$11-million low interest loan from the state. The remaining sewer lines are in good shape, he said.

“Our sewer problem will be over—it’s already over,” Toor added.

The process involves relining the pipes with a plastic sleeve rather than replacing them, which has been successfully used in Los Angeles, Toor said. “We basically put a new pipe inside the pipe,” Toor said. The city is also purchasing a \$400,000 device that will allow any ruptures or leaks to be fixed immediately once the truck arrives, and it has received a \$30,000 grant to buy an energy efficient vehicle on which to mount it.

Streets and Sidewalks

Although water and sewer projects mostly “pay for themselves” through fees, Toor explained that maintenance of our streets, sidewalks and trees must be paid for by the general fund.

“Our biggest challenge is our streets and sidewalks,” Toor said. The City Council has put about \$2 million, which amounts to about half the revenue from the Utility Users Tax, toward our streets for the past five years. But just to maintain them at the same level actually would cost about \$5 million to \$8 million per year, he said. Until there is more funding, the strategy has been to “do the major streets where we have heavy traffic or residential streets where we need it right away,” Toor said.

Trees and Lighting

Tree trimming and parks maintenance is done by contractors overseen by our new Public Works operations manager Kristine Courdy, who also attended Saturday’s meeting. There are about 10,000 trees in the city, which is proud to be known as the “city of trees.” But because of the drought and new pests, there are about 600 empty “tree wells” in the city, which is exploring ways to replace the trees, Toor said. “All well-established communities do

have great tree programs— and we are one of them. It is important to keep our forestry as good as it is or even better,” Toor said.

The city’s trees and streetlights are paid for by a property tax assessment, which brings in about \$900,000 per year while the city is spending \$1.1 million. The assessment has not increased since 1997, and under state law it cannot without the consent of a majority of property owners.

In order to allow the City Council to even explore a fee increase, a proposed ballot would be mailed out in late summer to homeowners seeking their approval of increased fees totaling about \$2 to \$2.50 per household per month.

The council will be considering this on Wednesday, August 17. If it is approved, ballots will go out shortly thereafter. A community meeting will be held on Aug. 25, at 6:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, 1424 Mission St. Ballots would need to be returned within 45 days and a public hearing would be held in late October to discuss the results.

Monterey road and the Proposed ‘Diet’

Monterey Road repaving will begin in the next couple of months, Toor said, first from Fair Oaks Avenue to Meridian Avenue and then westward to Via del Rey in about 18 months. The first phase of the contract will be awarded at Wednesday’s City Council meeting.

The proposed “road diet” that would narrow a portion of the thoroughfare to one lane of traffic is still being debated, but it is important just to repave the road and add leftturn lanes for now, Toor said. Options include installing a median, adding a bike lane or widening the sidewalks. “Whatever option you take, it is 5 million to 8 million dollars to do that project,” Toor said.

A committee and consultant were divided equally about what to do. “We are looking at the overall concept. We will proceed with that, but in the meantime ... it was my recommendation to come up with an interim solution,” Toor said.

The new traffic light at Orange Grove and Monterey Road has been funded but is still six to eight months away from completion, Toor said.