

Workman honored for stewardship efforts

By HEIDI DESCH
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Much of Whitefish Public Works Director Craig Workman's job is to plan for the future.

He oversees a department charged with building and maintaining municipal infrastructure for today and for decades to come. Currently, the city is in the midst of two major projects that are expected to serve residents for years to come — the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant and the expansion of the water treatment plant.

"The improvements we're making are going to endure for the next generations," he said. "That's what it's really about, making those milestone improvements that are going to last. We want to make sure we're managing our systems and continuing to have smart growth as a city."

Whitefish Lake Institute recently honored Workman with its annual Stewardship Award for his leadership in planning for water resilience for the city pointing to his work on a number of projects in the city, including upgrades to the treatment plants, but also putting forth the city's water conservation ordinance and working alongside other partners on the restoration of Cow Creek.

Mike Koopal, WLI Executive Director, said Workman leads a department charged with maintaining and improving the quality of life in Whitefish through a number of projects, all the while promoting environmental quality.

"Directing this department is a complex challenge that has been met professionally and thoughtfully by Craig," Koopal said.

Workman said he's humbled by the award, but it's really a credit to the hard work by everyone at the city, but especially

the extremely knowledgeable staff in public works.

"This is really an award for the entire city," he said. "There's been lots of tremendous work that has gone into this from city staff all the way to City Council."

Workman joined the city about five years ago, has 17 years of experience working in Public Works previously in Wisconsin and prior to that worked in the private sector. He earned a civil engineering degree from the University of Colorado Boulder.

Though the Public Works Department might get more than its fair share of complaints when rates increase or when operations don't run perfectly, Workman says he enjoys working with residents and business owners.

"Public Works is about making an impact on the way people live — from repairing potholes to making sure they have safe drinking water," he said. "It's the knowledge that when you go home at night you've made a positive impact on people's lives."

At the forefront of the Public Works Department's workload this year is the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant and expansion of its water plant.

The city has more than 58 miles of sewer main and 17 lift stations that serve the homes and businesses around the community. For years, the city has been planning for a new wastewater treatment plant to meet more stringent state standards for treatment that is now scheduled to be completed by summer 2021. Whitefish will be the first municipality in the U.S. to use the biological wastewater treatment technology selected for the new plant.

"The wastewater treatment plant will transform the way we manage wastewater," Workman said. "The plant is going to change

the whole process and we'll have much more control rather than waiting on Mother Nature."

The upgrades to the water plant are designed to add treatment capacity planning for increased drinking water needs during peak summer months that push the capacity of the current plant. Other ongoing efforts have worked to address water conservation in the city systems including replacing cast iron water mains and reducing the amount of water leaks.

Related to that, Workman was instrumental in bringing forward a water conservation ordinance adopted by City Council last year. The ordinance was designed to address the city's infrastructure challenges by seeking water conservation from residents and businesses.

"It's really about wasting less water," he said. "That's important for any community whether you're in the desert or the mountains. Water is a valuable resource and it shouldn't be wasted. We have to manage our water system and especially as we continue to grow as a city."

In planning for the future, the Public Works Department has been working for the last few years to locate an underground water source that could be utilized for drinking water.

The Public Works Department also partnered in the design, construction and funding of the Cow Creek restoration project, which aimed to bring to fruition a goal of ecological improvements along two highly impacted reaches of the local stream and tributary to the Whitefish River. The city provided labor and materials for construction of two hardened crossings of the creek on two private properties to create livestock crossings.

TOWN & COUNTRY



Craig Workman is the Public Works Director for the City of Whitefish. He has held the position for about five years. (Heidi Desch/Whitefish Pilot)