

MEMO FROM EMMETT MAYOR GORDON W. PETRIE

SUBJECT: NO NEED FOR IMAGINARY HOBGOBLINS, WE HAVE REAL ONES

H. L. Mencken, American journalist, essayist, satirist—plus all-around critic of early 20th Century American culture—once commented on the total aim of practical politics: “... to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.” Baltimore-born in 1880, Mencken passed there in January 1956.

It’s just as well. The Orioles’ 69-85 record that year might have been too much for him. Regardless, it appears things haven’t changed much since Mencken’s death, at least concerning the Orioles, and, of course, politics. Even so, Emmett has no good reason to manufacture hobgoblins. We have plenty of our own. Many older than me!

The city’s focus this Fiscal Year (FY) and in the next has been and will be infrastructure in these descending priorities: streets, water/sewer, fiber optic and sidewalks. Besides water and sewer rates (previous administrations planted that hobgoblin way before I got to city hall—though the good news is, no increases during my administration), the number one complaint focuses on streets. Indeed, *that* complaint typically makes number one—or at least the top five—for mayors throughout Idaho, if not our nation.

Why is that the common complaint throughout the land? The reason is both fundamental and frustrating: funding. There’s simply not enough funding available to local or state governments to take care of streets and roads at the level people demand when the unit of government in question must live within a balanced budget. Nevertheless, with the cooperation of all city departments and the incredible uptick in performance by our Public Works Department in

the last couple of years, we have found ways to substantially leverage and increase funds not otherwise dedicated to streets.

In FY 2017-18, we could only muster an anemic \$84,000 for street projects, primarily from state and federal funding. In FY 2018-19, we increased available project funds to \$151,123, though not exclusively through street-dedicated funds—we squeezed more from general funding. In the proposed FY 2019-20 budget, we squeezed harder and plan spending \$176,000. While hardly robust, it still amounts to over twice what we mustered two budgets ago. The Substation and South John’s Main to Fourth Street improvements came from this effort. Our Safe-Routes-to-School grant-initiative on 12th Street further underscores efforts to improve Emmett’s road infrastructure.

Our formula is a practical one. We are able to fund more for streets as we learn to do more with less in other areas. In other words, we trim every corner and facet we can find in order to shift non-dedicated (general) funds to road maintenance wherever practicable. Further, we leverage the extra funds we make available by doing much of the work ourselves. Public works is getting pretty darn good at building a road. But it is a process we must learn as we go. After all, “we never did it that way before.” Actually, *that* unfortunate fact explains some of the hobgoblins that exceed my age.

Too many of Emmett’s streets were never laid out quite right—and I don’t mean just streets with catawampus intersections. Too many have substandard beds. Couple that dilemma with huge drainage issues regarding runoff and we have the makings of the perfect *imperfect* storm drain. That’s why the intersection at 6th and Washington becomes lake-like after a substantial rain or snow melt. Fear not, these issues are on Public Works’ “punch” list.

Clint Seamons and his outstanding crew will do the heavy lifting never done before to fix our infrastructure problems needing the most attention. Does the progress seem slow? Yes. But remember, just like your family, our “family” must always keep its budget balanced.