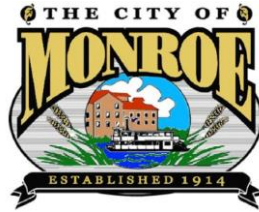


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April 14, 2023

Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, Co-Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith; Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your time this evening.

I am Steve Martinenko, the City Administrator for Monroe. I am in support of House Bill 3416 and funding for all rural infrastructure across the state. We are asking for \$1.3 M to help resolve issues with our water treatment facility in order to meet current regulatory mandates and make the system, as a whole, more sustainable for a small community to operate and maintain.

Monroe has a population of 723 yet we have full municipal water facilities including water treatment and waste lagoons. These are expensive to operate for a small community, yet necessary for the health and safety of our citizens.

There are two staff that run both facilities – I am the principal operator of both and assisted by our lone public works person, who, as you might imagine, has their hands full with everything else “public works.” But that is not uncommon in small towns. Collectively, all of us wear many hats. It’s part of the job.

However, neither of us can spend all our time at the water plant. The City Council and the citizens of Monroe need the other “hats,” too, such as planning, ordinance enforcement, streets, parks, and the many meetings and activities that are required for good governance and transparency. Our water treatment plant is time consuming, complex, and requires a certified grade II operator. These advanced grades are expensive, hard to find, and if you are lucky enough to find one willing to start work in a rural community, they will soon be tempted to leave for a larger city that can afford to pay more.

Being the water operator puts me in a unique position to understand a complex problem. The City has struggled with its water treatment since moving away from springs and wells in 1990’s due to capacity and increasing regulations that the city did not have the resources to meet.

Our current water system is a result of that struggle. Unfortunately, while one set of problems were solved, more took its place. Not only is the system more complex and expensive to operate and maintain, the City is currently under another administrative order to fix issues with regulated disinfectant by-products, a result of our disinfectant, chlorine, and the dissolved organics in the water we draw from the Long Tom River.

To explain, normally, a water filtration system that draws from surface water will have settling basins and chemicals to help remove most of the organics before filtering. Our system was put in place in a hurry to mitigate a regulatory order in the early 2000's and was approved without the pre-filtering equipment. Since then, the regulations changed and became stricter, making our "compliant" water system not so much. In addition, the industrial computers that run our plant are proprietary and obsolete. Many parts can only be found as surplus, e.g., from E-Bay. With our current "approved" system, if the computers fail, we cannot produce water manually.

We are asking for assistance to fix these problems and at the same time, make the changes necessary so our system is sustainable for a small town. It is important that you understand we do not want to keep reaching out for assistance. We hear the other requests for help, such as South Benton Food Pantry in Monroe that provide services to the underserved citizens in our regional community.

Going forward, we hope that all requests for infrastructure assistance are sustainable for the towns they help. It is for the health and safety of our citizens, and the right thing to do for all Oregonians. With your help, we believe we can make changes to our water system that both keep our citizens healthy and safe, and also so our citizens can afford to operate and maintain.

On behalf of our Mayor, Council, the citizens of Monroe and all rural communities, I thank you for your time.