

City of Thompson Falls



Mayor

Mark Sheets

City Attorney

Timothy Goen

Ward I

Larry Lack

Raoul Ribeiro, Pres.

Ward II

Katherine Maudrone

Earlene Powell

Ward III

Hayley Allen-Blakney

Shawni Vaught

January 12, 2023

Montana Legislature Long Range Planning Committee

Dear Chairman Hopkins and members of the Long-Range Planning Committee,

I regret not being able to attend today's hearing on HB 11 in person, and I thank you for the opportunity to tell you about and urge your support for the Thompson Falls Water Project, HB 6, and HB 11.

- The City of Thompson Falls has requested a \$125,000 Montana Renewable Resource grant and a \$750,000 Montana Coal Endowment Program to improve our water system.
- The project includes the construction of a new well, a 400,000-gallon pre-stressed concrete water tank, and the replacement of an undersized and leaking water main.
- The project is necessary to bring the system into compliance with DEQ Circular 1, which requires us to provide water on the "maximum day, plus fire flow demands where fire protection is needed.
- Last Summer during the 4th of July weekend, the pump on our largest well burned out and severe water restrictions were needed. This shows the need for another well to augment what we have now and also flows from Ashely Creek Springs are dropping.
- We are currently under an exemption for water storage and need a new tank. During the Thorne Creek Fire last Summer citizens got concerned. They turned on sprinklers and drained our tanks. More restrictions were needed so we could keep storage for possible fires. Our small tank is getting close to being 100 years old.
- The total project cost is approximately \$5.5 million, and we need the MCEP and RRGL grant funding to keep our user rates as low as possible.
- Even with the requested grant funds, the proposed project will raise user rates by approximately \$3.40 to \$56.43 per month.

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- The increase, along with the City's average residential sewer rate of \$58.50, will increase the combined rate to \$114.93 per month, or 179% of the Target Rate.
- The 2019 median household income (MHI) in Thompson Falls is \$33,516. Over 55% of the population is low-and-moderate-income, and 20% of its residents live in poverty.
- Despite our financial challenges, our community is committed to providing residents with safe and reliable water and wastewater infrastructure.
- Early this year, we will complete Phase 1 of a \$34.8 million wastewater project, with the construction of Phase 2 beginning in 2024.

Your support of HB 6 and HB 11 will help us hold the line on user rates to the project when our residents are, or soon will be, paying rates and assessments approximately 200% of the current Target Rate once our wastewater and the proposed water projects are complete.

Thank you for your time, and please feel free to contact me at (406) 381-6903.

Respectfully,



Mark Sheets, Mayor