



MERRIAM WOODS SUMMER NEWSLETTER



It is time for our seasonal update on what is going on in the community of Merriam Woods!

One of the most exciting things going on at City Hall this year has been the Food Pantry. Inflation and gas prices have really hurt some in our community financially and food has become harder to buy. We have seen a rise in the number of people that are really struggling to buy food. We started the food pantry again, after covid, last fall and it's proven to be helpful to many of our families. It has been amazing to see the people in our community who have really stepped up to help their neighbor. One person donates a full spaghetti dinner, bread included every week. That inspired another customer to commit to bringing \$50 worth of food every month. After a Board Meeting one night, I proudly showed off our small but growing pantry to Prosecuting Attorney Anna Morrissey. Anna said she would like to help and would make some phone calls. The next day a truck backed up to our building. Anna's family had brought a pickup truck full of food. There was enough food to fill every shelf in our pantry. Full. The next week Walmart donated 11 boxes of different kinds of snacks. The week after that, Anna Morrissey and her family filled the shelves again. The generosity of these people has helped to feed many people in our community. Our food pantry is here to help those that are struggling. We have bags in the lobby and encourage you to take no more than two bags full of food so more people can benefit from the donations. If you would like to help your neighbors in need, we are always accepting donations at our food pantry. We purchased another shelf to enable us to hold more food and personal items people have donated. We at City Hall would like to thank the wonderful generous people who have donated and want them to know they are making a big difference in the lives of others. Also, we have a fan program for people without air-conditioning. If you or someone you know does not have air conditioning, please leave your name with me and we will verify and get you a fan. It is too hot for anyone to be without a way to get cool.

Most of you have heard about the new smart water meters the city purchased with some of the AARPA funds last year. The meters have arrived, and our public works crew, Zach and Danny have worked very hard to get them installed. We have over 400 meters installed that we are working to get established and current in our billing system. Our utility clerk Jeanette is working hard to learn the new system and make the necessary adjustments and updates. Some of you will get bills that seem high or incorrect. They may or may not be. All you must do is bring it to our attention and we will get it fixed. This is unavoidable and was expected. I want to thank the ones of you that have received unusually high bills and have called or come to the office to get it corrected. Your patience and understanding are very helpful and encourages us to continue to work hard to make this transition as painless for our customers as possible. We have had a few that come to the office or call yelling and accusing our utility clerk or myself of intentionally raising your water usage to charge you more for our

own personal gain. I can assure you that is unfounded and untrue and if you think about it, a little bit ridiculous. I understand a higher than usual water bill is alarming, and we don't expect anyone to pay for water they are not using. We will figure out your correct water bill based on the water you are using. Some people may be upset because after months of averaging bills in our system, most customers were paying the minimal amount possible, \$39.00. Now that the new meters are calculating your actual water usage a lot of people will go back to higher bills. Please remember this is what every water department does. Charges for water that you use every month. Again, we appreciate your patience. These new water meters also detect leaks in people's homes and in this case, we can contact you to make you aware of the problem. We can see how much water you use by the hour. You can as well, after you sign up, free of charge, with eyeonwater.com. We have information in City Hall to help you get your account set up to monitor your own water. Seasonal customers especially like this feature because it enables them to be hours away from their property but monitor their water usage from another location. If you have any questions about the website, your water bill or your new smart meter please don't hesitate to call us!

Now roads. This is the biggest complaint or concern we hear about and let me assure every one of you, we hear you. Not one of us will argue with you about the condition of these roads. We understand you are tired of your car repairs, tire blow outs and unsafe conditions. We agree with you completely. Let me apologize to you all for the actions of those who are responsible for the destruction of your roads back in 2012. The previous city clerk, worked for 2 years to get a road tax passed and accomplished that last August 2021. This road tax will help. Some. As you know these roads are extreme. Every road needs to be paved. That's 28 miles of road. Our road tax per year is only enough to get just a few roads paved. We bought a road paver to begin this process soon. We will begin to pave roads as soon as the last meter is installed. The meters must come first so the city can begin to recover some of the \$20,000/month we were losing estimating bills. That \$20,000/month will help with other things in Merriam Woods, like roads. The meters should be complete in the next few weeks. Again, I thank you for your patience. The city will do the worst, most traveled roads first. I believe Spruce, Old Trail and Stone are the top 3 on our list. We will get to your road as soon as the funds become available. Ward 1 Alderman Sheila Karges and Ward 2 Alderman Terri Conner and I have attended several government meetings this year to try to find more help. We attended a meeting with Taney County/MoDOT board to see what projects they have planned and how we can become one of them, we are on their list of communities that need help; however, it would be many years before they could get to us. One of our citizens contacted Jason Wert, a reporter for the TRI-Lakes Newspaper. Mr. Wert came to Merriam Woods to investigate the roads and to find out the reason they are in such disrepair. Mayor Ault and I were both interviewed and expressed our own concerns and frustrations at the seemingly hopeless road situation. The article was on the front page of the Branson Tri-Lakes Newspaper and hi-lighted accurately the problems that have caused and kept our roads in such bad condition. I encourage you to read the article for yourself. Mayor Ault also contacted Brian Seitz, our representative, He is looking into possible help as well. Mayor Ault has also tried contacting the County Commissioner's Office. They have not responded yet. There is not one single reason for the road conditions. There are many. One of the seemingly small things you each can do to help is keep your culverts clean and clear. If a culvert is full, then rainwater will spill into the road causing further damage. If we all take responsibility for what we can do, then we are that much more ahead of the game. I know you're angry. I know you're frustrated. We do not blame you. I can honestly tell you your board of alderman and your mayor are actively working to better this city.

I strongly encourage each one of you to come the Board of Alderman Meeting the second Tuesday of the month. It starts at 6:00 p.m. If you would like to be heard by the board, come to City Hall, and fill out a request to be on the agenda at least 7 days before the next meeting. We cannot take any request that come before the Monday 7 days prior to the next meeting. We have a very diverse group of people governing our community and it's interesting to see the wisdom they bring. Unfortunately for some, we won't be repeating the same topics every month over and over just because the answer is not what they wanted to hear. Board meetings are a place you can discuss your concerns with the board or get answers to your questions, if possible, in a calm reasonable manner. We would love to see attendance grow at these meetings. This is the best place for your concerns to be heard and for us to find a solution for your problem. Angry outburst and profane accusations will not be tolerated in the meeting and/or in City Hall. We ask you keep that behavior at home. Please keep in my mind, most of your anger is towards people who no longer work here. Again, I can apologize and I do, but I can't change what was done 2 or 3 or 10 years ago. I can assure you none of us here now, have been or will be involved in anything other than doing our jobs or fulfilling our responsibilities.

This administration is very transparent and has been active in getting the delayed audits up to date. We have been working with the MML and the Attorney General's Office to navigate through some past issues and build a very strong, transparent relationship with the community we serve. There will always be some unhappy people no matter what we do. I joke that if we paved their roads in gold, they would be mad it was 10kt instead of 24. We are working hard for all of you. We understand some of you won't see that and we accept that. I can promise, the ones who always seem to complain, won't stop us from moving on to find a solution for the rest of you. If you come to my office to yell, I will most likely ask you if you want to be part of the problem or the solution. I personally am focused on the solution. I believe that most of you are as well. We are actively working on grants; we are starting to pave roads soon; we are looking into other grants as well; you have a board that is proactive and involved. Bottom line is, we as the City of Merriam Woods are moving forward and focusing on making this community the beautiful lakeside, peaceful place it was intended to be. Again, we can't undo what has or hasn't been done in the past, but we can support each other on moving forward. I want to personally thank those of you who have been so supportive and understanding and just plain kind. Your kindness is invaluable to me. Thank You!

Chief Lewis has been working on a new online reporting system that you can access on our website (merriamwoodsmo.org) or the police website (mwmopd.org). You can file reports for MINOR crimes and/or ordinance violations for the Police Department or a work order request for Public Works. Hopefully this will aid in getting more statements filed and more accurate information for the police to investigate.

Chief Lewis hosted our first End of School Movie Night in the park last May and we are looking forward to our next Movie Night in the Park on Saturday August 20. There will be more activities and businesses involved so we will be starting earlier. We will have more details on our website closer to August 20th. We had a great time the last time so we hope you all will bring your families out and help us celebrate one last time this summer!

HAPPY SUMMER EVERYONE!!!

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