



Mayor's Letter
October 15, 2015

Hello Everyone,

WATER UPDATE. In an abundance of caution, over the last couple of weeks we have been successfully operating our water system using only two wells, with Well #2 turned off. This is not an unusual situation, our normal winter operating procedures are that we turn off one well to save energy (usually Well #3), so in this case, we will just continue with the current operations. To be safe, we will keep the current watering restrictions in place until our next council meeting, at which time we will consider lifting them.

ITS NOT ABOUT THE MONEY. It really bothers me when I hear someone say that they shouldn't have to have something inspected and that we are just trying to make money. Let me clear this up and give you a better, more complete, picture of the issue. First, the permit fee is a "fee" not a tax - it is to recover a cost that we incur. In Lakewood Village most of the fee you pay us, we turn right around and pay to the building inspector. So, how much money are we talking about? Looking at our audited financial statements for the last four years, the amount of money the town received for electrical, plumbing, flatwork, and remodel permits totaled 0.22 percent of our total revenues. That's less than 1/4 of one percent. We spent more money on toner for our printer. **It has nothing to do with the money.**

In fact, the town council periodically reviews and adjusts our fees. For example, in May 2011, we lowered the fee for a fence permit from \$100 to \$25. **More recently**, in June 2014 we reduced contractor registration fees from \$100 (builders were \$500) to \$25 and we limited the registration requirement to only those trades licensed by the State. We pay for inspections too, so we try to keep our fees as low as possible while still being fiscally responsible. While there are a million great things about being in a small town, one of the few negative consequences is that we don't get economies of scale. We typically only have three to five inspections per week - obviously not enough for a full-time inspector. But, the silver lining is that with such a low volume we can hire the best, most knowledgeable inspectors in the area to work for us after-hours. Why don't we just hire a cheaper "rookie" inspector? Two reasons, first, our houses are all custom built and unique - I want inspectors who have experience and have "seen it all". I don't want someone learning the job at our expense. Second, unfortunately, some contractors arrive in our small town and wrongly assume that we are naive and they can get away with taking short-cuts during construction. Our head building official Steve Freeman is closing in on his 300,000th inspection - believe me - he makes it clear to the contractors exactly what code is and the type of work is expected of them. He has their attention. And, by the way, Steve also writes the study manuals for inspectors taking their exams. We are very fortunate, and it is money very well spent.

PERMITS BENEFIT YOU. When you apply for a permit, you actually benefit in two ways. First, we review the permit/plans of what you are trying to do to make sure the project you are proposing complies with our town ordinances, state laws, and our international building codes. For example, suppose you install a beautiful \$20,000 wood fence around your waterfront property and don't submit a permit; yes, you saved the \$25 permit fee, but the fence must be demolished as you cannot have a solid fence on a waterfront lot (LWV ordinance, FEMA flood loss prevention ordinance, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regulations). And, no you cannot get a variance after-the-fact. Under State and local laws, the Town Council cannot grant a variance for a hardship that was self-inflicted. If you want to spend your hard-earned money improving your property, we are fully supportive. We want you to succeed; if we identify a problem we will work with you to modify your plans. We can't help you if we don't know what you're doing. And that "ask for forgiveness rather than permission" thing can end up being a really expensive mistake.

The Second Benefit is that we inspect the work to make sure that it was done properly and there are no life, health, or safety issues. The permit also identifies the contractor and collects their licensing information so



that we can confirm it. If the state of Texas requires certain trades to be licensed by a state agency, then, for your protection we have the responsibility to verify it before they perform work here in Lakewood Village. All **licensed** contractors know they have to pull permits for their jobs. Under State law, a hot-water heater installation can only be performed by the homeowner or a licensed plumber, you cannot use a “handyman”. In all cases, the work must be inspected. Recently a homeowner had a hot-water heater installed and wanted to know why we required a permit. The picture to the left is from the inspection the day after the “installation” was **complete**. As you can see the pipes were not even connected - what do you think about the quality of the gas or electrical connections ?

The problem with hot-water heaters is not that they are complex or difficult to install – it’s that the consequences of an improper installation can be very bad, or as we say, they can “fail ugly”. Last year we received a complaint from a citizen regarding a water heater being installed by someone claiming to be a handy-man. They talked the owner into saving money by not getting a permit, so until she called us, we knew nothing. When we inspected the work, we found that the installer had sealed off the pressure release valve - in other words he had created a bomb. No reputable contractor who spends years being licensed is going to risk their career for the sake of you avoiding a \$75 permit fee. Would you really feel comfortable hiring someone who **doesn’t want** their work inspected ? About three years ago, a realtor showed up at town hall and asked me for information regarding a house that was for sale. The realtor represented the buyer, but was confused by the listing documents showing the house 200 square feet larger than the Denton County Appraisal Office records. We pulled the house file and building plans and had no record of the “addition” - they did it without permits. We had no information on the extended foundation, drainage, how the addition was framed, whether it was attached to the existing house correctly, and no electrical, plumbing or structural inspections. The buyer walked away - the required inspections would have only cost about \$300. That’s not a winning strategy.

THE HALLOWEEN HAYRIDE IS A LAKEWOOD VILLAGE TRADITION. You know the date, the place is Town Hall (be there by 6:00 p.m.) the trailers hit the road at 6:30. Don’t be late. As always, there will be one trailer dedicated to our smallest trick-or-treaters in training.

THE NEXT REGULAR TOWN COUNCIL MEETING is scheduled for November 12th.

Everyone knows who has the best Halloween candy in LWV,

Dr. Mark E. Vargus
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