

Letter to the citizens of Saguache from the Mayor  
August 29, 2017

The town is close to beginning the construction phase of the sewer project. Recent resignations have caused the town to delay this project by a few months. Last week, the town was able to receive time extensions from both the Colorado Power Authority and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE.) August 24th, Paul Young, Project Manager of the Water Quality Control Division of CDPHE met with the public works director of Saguache, the town's engineers, and the mayor to establish new timelines, compliance, and the details needed to keep the sewer project moving forward. The mayor did ask Mr. Young, "What if we do not move forward?" Mr. Young said, "The town can owe a million dollars now and solve its waste water problems or in three years owe 10 to 20 million dollars under a state mandate." There are a few hurdles left to address before construction can begin which is now scheduled for March 2018. One last public information meeting is required, and there are a few other last requirements by CDPHE and the Colorado Power Authority to be completed in the next few months. This project began three years ago. Thanks to the hard work of the former town administrator and the public works director, the project has proceeded efficiently, correctly, and timely over the past year. CDPHE has said the town is close to completing the required paper work, grant applications, financing requirements, engineering studies and reports in a superior and proactive manner. The number one concern is to see that this project does not derail, but instead proceeds on course. If it does not, the town would find itself in a costly situation, most likely meaning several years delay, most definitely much higher water and sewer rates, large fines to the town, and continued problems with the sewer system and non-compliance at the lagoon.

The town still must meet state mandates for water augmentation. The town is in the final stretch of this process. Water court should start objections in 2018. The town's water attorney and the town's water augmentation engineer were scheduled to update the board in August. It will be rescheduled once the town has a full board. The town still will have to solve its obligations to the Rio Grande River and San Luis Creek and the board will have to solve this by considering the options of water trades, water right leasing, water right purchase, or monetary payments to the district. The town's surface water rights and ditches have put the town on a good foundation in complying with augmentation, but decisions remain to be made.

The Planning Commission is currently working on a new informational survey for the town. It was hoped the survey would take place in September. This may need to be delayed, due to the resignations. This survey will help in the determining the course the town takes into the future and updating the master plan.

The Community Building Committee and the Vista Grande Committee could begin meeting once the board is filled. The Community Building Project is now ready to identify and pursue grant funding and then start renovation of the community building and park. This project will require four grants to be written and submitted to start. Vista Grande is near a similar point.

The final “best practices” in the town’s budget and accounting could be implemented and finished by the end of the year. The town auditor and the former town administrator had been working on this project over the past year. The result will be a complete and efficient accounting system, computerized, and an understandable and transparent budget. When completed, it will provide proper oversight of the town’s accounting practices. The town’s audit is currently being performed. The mayor has talked with the auditor several times over the past few weeks and has asked the auditor to notify the town board of any concerns. The auditor has said the books look good, that the town is in a very good financial position, and is pleased with the town’s overhaul of it’s accounting practices. In a recent newspaper article, it was reported that the mayor did not think a forensic audit is needed. In fact it was the town’s auditor who said that he saw no need for a costly forensic audit.

The former town administrator had secured the contract requirements with Colorado Statewide Internet Portal Authority (SIPA) and would have begun building a new website for the town. When completed, the new website will provide user friendly access to more complete information, easier searches, quicker updates and notifications, as well as e-services to citizens such as account information and online payments. The primary purpose of the website will be to improve communication by the town to the town’s citizens. This was scheduled to be finished in December. This too will be delayed, due to the recent resignations. It is hoped that this will remain a high priority.

Karen Goldman from Colorado Municipal League came down a few months ago to assess the town’s filing and record keeping practices. The former town administrator had begun following Goldman’s recommendations for reorganizing the filing system and document retention. The town has several resources available to continue this project, but for the moment, this is on hold.

You may have noticed the renovations at Town Hall. This was done for the safety and protection of town staff and was precipitated by incidents that put town hall staff in dangerous and uncomfortable situations, and by the town's insurance carrier's recommendation.

The mayor appointed an interim administrator, until the board determines otherwise. The interim administrator is Brandy Reitter. She was highly recommended by both CML and Department of Local Affairs. She comes with vast experience, a master's degree in municipal administration, and a great knowledge in water/sewer infrastructure. The last of which will be invaluable to the town considering the current sewer project. She is here to help the town by continuing to operate the town's business, keep projects moving forward, and to move the town past it's current state. Please welcome her, and be kind towards her, in her efforts to help the town.

The town is currently advertising for a town clerk, deputy-clerk, and public works worker. The town hopes to fill these positions as soon as is possible.