

# Project Budget Tight

## CITY OFFICIALS WANT TO PROTECT MAJOR PROJECTS, INTERCHANGE

By Steve Caraway

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SPRINGDALE — A wide variety of questions at a town hall meeting Thursday received the same answer - lack of money.

Springdale Mayor Doug Sprouse, four members of the City Council and city department heads answered questions at the town hall meeting, held by the group Citizens for a Future Springdale.

Questions from the small group of about 25 in attendance covered infrastructure projects, competition for city contracts, sidewalks, recycling, Christmas lights, support for downtown, stimulus money, parks and the budget.

Sprouse's answer to an early question could have applied to almost any that asked if funds were available for an issue.

"Times are tight," Sprouse said. "We've got to get through the lean years. I want to protect the projects we're finishing now and the interchange."

The interchange, which would connect Don Tyson Parkway with Interstate 540, is the top priority for new projects, Sprouse said. The project falls under federal guidelines, which could stretch out its time line, Sprouse said.

"It's going to be frustrating," Sprouse said. "It may be 2012 before we turn any dirt. It's a slow process."

The process for building the interchange is on the same pace as the interchange Rogers completed, Sprouse said.

The last of the city's street bond program - widening Wagon Wheel Road - should wrap up in the spring, Sprouse said. Two projects with which also use federal funding, improvements on Arkansas 265 south of Robinson Avenue and on Johnson Road, also could start next year. City funding is already in place for those projects, Sprouse said.

Pitting one company against the other can help the city save money and provide better services, said Alderman Mike Overton.

"Was the agreement completed?" Wolf asked. "No, it was not."

"If anybody has failed, it was me," Beverly Williams, former justice of the peace and HIV Task Force member, said, noting the work is being done, albeit slowly.

When put to a vote, the Finance Committee agreed to give \$17,000 to the clinic in 2010.

"This will be the last \$17,000 that I will vote for," Wolf said with fellow justices of the peace Kurt Moore and Robert Stephenson agreeing with her sentiments.

Benton County's 2010 operating budget also includes \$330,000 to purchase two new fire trucks for area volunteer fire departments and \$360,000 to purchase 200 electronic voting machines for the Election Commission.

Justices of the peace voted to include the monies to purchase the voting machines after learning the new machines will save the county \$95,616 each year on printing paper ballots, Richard McComas, county comptroller, said.

The 2010 budget also allows for just one new position, a staff assistant in the election commission's office. The position will cost the county an additional \$28,000 per year and will become the commission's first full-time employee, said Bill Williams, chairman of the election commission.

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