

## Baxter Springs continues to seek cause of water loss

**B**axter Springs city officials have begun working to reduce the estimated 100 million gallons of water for which the city could not account last year.

City Councilman Larry Warner, chairman of the Baxter Springs Water Committee, reported the 100-million-gallon water loss to the council in May. The council appointed a committee of city staff members to find the cause of the loss and report back to the council in July.

The July 24 report does not specify a source for the loss, but states that the Kansas Rural Water Association made several recommendations after visiting town from February through May. The recommendations included:

- Calibrate meters at the water treatment plant.
- Replace all high-flow meters with compound meters to accurately measure low-volume water usage.
- Confirm that position-sensitive meters are installed properly.
- Start a residential meter replacement program for all meters that are either 10 years old or have recorded a million gallons of water.

Warner said Wednesday that it may be difficult for the city to identify all sources of water loss.

"This is an old system," Warner said. "Our infrastructure is showing signs of weakness. We believe we have leaks."

Warner said many towns face the same problems, naming Neosho, Mo., as one.

Neosho City Manager Jan Blase said his town does have a problem with water loss, because

of the age of the system. He said Neosho has undergone a program of meter replacement and billing analysis. The town also is paying firms to detect leaks in the system. He said more information will be shared at a meeting on Sept. 4.

the city must pinpoint the cause before considering a water-rate increase.

"We've got to know where the water loss is before we increase the citizens' rates," Warner said in May.

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"We've changed out every meter in town," Blase said.

Warner said the Kansas Rural Water Association is helping the city with its equipment that can identify the sources of leaks.

When the city replaced a water meter at the Baxter Springs Country Club that wasn't accurately measuring water usage, the country club's water bill increased beyond what it had budgeted. The council at a recent meeting agreed to reduce the country club's water rate to \$1.81 per 1,000 gallons of water used until April 2008. The rate is equal to the city's cost plus 10 percent.

Warner said though it's a reduced rate, the country club is paying more than it had been paying when the water meter wasn't functioning correctly.

Warner said one other commercial user with an inaccurate water meter had been identified and the meter has been replaced. He declined to name the user.

At the meeting in May when Warner announced the loss of 100 million gallons of water, he said

He said Wednesday that enough progress has been made to allow for the water rates to be increased.

"I think we've identified a lot of the areas" of water loss, Warner said. "I don't think we can wait much longer to increase the rates."

Warner said the cost of water-treatment chemicals, electricity and other costs will make an increase necessary soon. He said he didn't want to comment about the popularity among residents of a water-rate increase after approving reduced rates for the country club.

### **Loss-reduction recorded**

The July 24 report states that unaccounted-for water loss was 18 percent of the amount pumped in June, compared with a 42 percent water loss in May. The report also states that close monitoring of water usage would continue.

*Since the story ran, the Baxter Springs City Council has introduced a water-rate increase ordinance, with final action expected at the council's October 23 meeting.*

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