

## Recent flooding still on city councilors' minds

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 09 September 2022 02:43

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Heavy rain has been a problem for Gallup for a majority of the late summer months.

According to Public Works Director Robert Hamblen, the city has seen seven inches of rain since June. The weekend of Aug. 19 saw major flooding; Hamblen said some areas got as much as two inches of rain within an hour.

“We pray hard for rain – I think everybody’s been praying for rain because we’ve been hoping and praying that we wouldn’t have forest fires like they’ve had up in the northern part of New Mexico – but we didn’t expect it all at once,” Hamblen said.

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The Public Works Department's clean-up efforts after a flood includes removing trash, fallen trees, old appliances, furniture, and anything else that ends up in the city's drainage system.

"Folks just throw things into the drainage ditches out of the city limits and even in the city limits," Hamblen said. "We have tons of drainage throughout our city, and It's pretty much a full-time job to keep those drainage areas clean."

Hamblen said that making sure drainage systems are clean is important, but that when large amounts of rain occur, there's only so much that can be done.

"When you get that kind of rain fall, you can prepare as much as you can, but when you get that kind of runoff, it don't matter what type of drainage system you have in place, it's just a huge amount of water in a short amount of time. You can prepare by trying to keep your drainage ditches clean as best you can, but when you get that type of runoff it just pulls debris from everywhere," Hamblen said.

Hamblen had his crews out working long hours, and during an Aug. 23 interview with the *Sun*, he said clean-up efforts were going well.

"[The flood recovery efforts are] going well. The street department has been out in full force doing clean up in the streets where a lot of debris has kind of run off vacant properties along West Aztec Avenue," Hamblen said. "There's quite a bit of mud that got under the street there. Also on Clark Street just between Aztec Avenue and Highway 66 there was quite a bit of debris that hit up in that area."

On the west side of the city, Councilor Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, said that the Stagecoach area was hit pretty hard by the flooding.

"In the Stagecoach area people that have tri-level homes have been getting flooded," Palochak said. "Especially those on Camino Del Sol, when they get torrential rain, the drainage up on top

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of the hill gets kind of backed up because it's not big enough to take the rain on so quickly. It'll come over and it'll just inundate their street and it goes into the lower levels of their homes."

Palochak said that getting that area's drainage system fixed is something that's on the city's Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan.

"They've been requesting that that drainage be fixed and it's on the ICIP list, it's on our list to get fixed, but it's one of many [things on that list] and it's going to take a lot of money," Palochak said. "I'm going to request that we also put in a capital outlay request for a design phase, and then we're going to have to keep going back to the state for additional funds to get that done."

Palochak was unable to give a timeline for the Camino Del Sol project.

Another flooding-related project that Palochak wants to see get finished is the West Aztec project.

"Then the second thing is I've been a councilor for seven years, and I have been working on another West Aztec drainage problem because when there's torrential rains it gets like a big swimming pool on West Aztec," Palochak said. "We've got money from the state to help with that project, but we still need to ask for more. It just takes forever to get anything done in this city."

Palochak said that hopefully the West Aztec Avenue project will be done some time next year,

Meanwhile, in District 3, Councilor Sarah Piano said she's seen pretty minimal flooding. She said the only calls she's gotten were about some flooding near UNM-Gallup and in her own neighborhood, the Mossmon neighborhood.

Both councilwomen voiced their support for the Public Works Department and its efforts to clean up the city.

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"I see our Public Works staff getting out there with their heavy equipment, especially on West Aztec because there's a rural area with hills and such, and when it rains so much it pushes [the mud] into the streets and it makes it very slick," Palochak said. "So I've seen them out with their big tractors and graders trying to push that mud out of the way. They even had to close the road a couple of times to try and clear that mud out because it was terrible."

Palochak said that despite the long hours and staff shortages, the city staff still seemed to be in a positive mood.

"Our public works folks work day and night to try and clear this up, and with staff shortages it's so hard to get people to apply for jobs and work. They're just working themselves to death, but they continue to do it with a smile," Palochak said.

Piano talked about the rarity of the situation.

"It's like having a community in Phoenix, where it never snows, and then all of a sudden you get a ton of snow but you don't really own snowplows or anything because it doesn't really snow," Piano said. "I feel like that's kind of our situation; it almost never rains here and now we've got an immense amount of rain in the past couple of months that we probably haven't seen in years."

Palochak noted that the Gallup Fire Department does provide free sandbags, and that people should be using them when flooding occurs.

"We have to work together as a community to try and get that water to not come in our homes, because unfortunately the city can't do it all alone," Palochak said.

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