



# TOWN OF ALBERTON WATER SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Number 1

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## **BACKGROUND**

The Town of Alberton has always been dedicated to providing safe and dependable drinking water to its customers. Recognizing that the system had a number of problems back in 2015, Alberton hired Anderson-Montgomery Consulting Engineers (AMCE) to evaluate the Town's entire drinking water system and to recommend any improvements that were determined necessary. In 2016, AMCE applied for a \$125,000 grant to fix the highest-priority needs: automation of the Town's well; adding disinfection; source metering and replacement of a broken valve at the spring source near the tank. The \$173,100 project was completed in 2020, the water system is much safer and the Town did not have to raise rates.

## **PROJECT NEED**

The system still has a number of significant problems, including (in order of priority):

1. Distribution piping – deterioration and leaks becoming more frequent, some water mains are as small as 3/4" and many are 2" diameter. Minimum required size is 6" to deliver adequate flows;
2. Spring source – lack of fencing and collection piping gallery in need of replacement/enhancement;
3. Individual water meters – only a fraction of the meters are functional and accurate;
4. Water sources – the Town's water supply is only 48% of what design standards require;
5. Water storage – the Town's storage capacity is only 73% of what design standards require

These problems were much more costly to fix than the project done in 2020, so the Town decided to break the project into several "phases" to take advantage of grant programs and ease the user rate impacts. In 2020 Alberton applied for over \$1.25M in grants to take care of items #1 thru #3 above. With these grants, the expected water rate increase was \$11<sup>90</sup>/month for all water customers.

## **GRANT MONEY SECURED**

Good news! This year, the Town received two grants –\$125,000 from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and \$750,000 from the Montana Department of Commerce. We are still awaiting word on a \$430,000 grant from the Montana DEQ.

Then along came COVID19. While 2020 was a pretty awful year for everybody, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) included funds for States and their municipalities to make much-needed improvements to their water and sewer systems. Alberton will automatically receive over \$202,000 in an ARPA allocation and is eligible to receive additional ARPA grant funds for the upcoming water project. On July 15, 2021, the Town submitted an ARPA Competitive Grant application for \$1,415,150 to take care of items #4 (new well) and #5 (new 200K-gallon storage tank) from the list above. The goal is to implement a project that resolves all of Alberton's water system problems, while keeping the user rate increase in the \$12/month range.

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## **PROJECT FUNDING & USER RATE IMPACTS**

The current funding package includes \$2,930,700 in grant funds, \$438,300 in a low-interest State Revolving Fund (SRF) loan and \$150,000 coming from the Town's reserve fund – for a total estimated project cost of \$3,519,000. If successful in the ARPA competition, the Town's project will have over 83% grant funding. The remaining 17% will be funded by a low-interest loan that is the Town's responsibility to pay back – requiring an increase in water user rates. Alberton held public hearings in May 2016 and May 2018 at which the estimated water rate increase of \$11<sup>88</sup>/month was discussed. Before Alberton can increase its rates, another public hearing will be conducted and public comment will be considered. It is important to note that 83% grant funding for an infrastructure project will never happen again. Typically, grant funding for an infrastructure project is around 50% at best.

The Town and AMCE will keep Alberton's residents updated on when the public hearing will be scheduled through postings and newsletters similar to this one – expect the hearing to occur in the Fall 2021. The public is welcome to provide comments to the Town at (406) 722-3404 or through the **"Water Project" link on the Town's website: [www.albertonmontana.com](http://www.albertonmontana.com)**. Comments can also be directed to the Town's Engineer, Paul Montgomery – President, AMCE at [paul@a-mce.com](mailto:paul@a-mce.com).

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## **SCHEDULE**

Alberton will be signing agreements in August 2021 with the funding agencies for grants already received. We should find out about the ARPA Competitive grant sometime in late summer. Next will be the public hearing and signing a commitment agreement for the SRF loan. If all goes well, the Town will sign an agreement with AMCE to design the project and we'll be ready to bid in Spring 2022. Construction would be completed by November 2022 at the earliest.

The Town residents should be aware that there will be significant disruptions to traffic, construction-related noise and disturbances and general inconvenience as the construction contractor digs up streets to install new distribution piping throughout Alberton. In many parts of Town, particularly Meadow View, RockLedge, Apple and Orchard, streets and right-of-way are very narrow and installation of pipe will be challenging. In some areas, the Town will need to acquire right-of-way to place new water pipes. We ask that the public be tolerant since we all have the common goal of making Alberton's water system the best it can be. **Please visit the Town's website for a preliminary map of the proposed project.**

We hope this newsletter has been helpful in keeping you informed on the upcoming project. Again, feel free to contact the Town or AMCE if you have any questions or concerns.