



**Fiscal Year 2022-2023**

**Budget Message**

The permit to establish the Corbett Water District as a taxing district is dated September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1932 and signed by district commissioners AG Salzman and Frank G Bell. The official water rights for our district were designated on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1933. Since that time the district has seen many changes, but not as many as one might think considering we are nearing 100 years of safe, clean drinking water. The system was designed to route water from the North Fork of Gordon creek into a nearby treatment system that filters and purifies the creek water. Our plant was built in the 1980s. The source of our water is now both the North Fork and South Fork intakes of Gordon Creek. Water is transported roughly five miles to our treatment plant, which consists of three filter ponds, a clear well, and a one-million-gallon reservoir. In addition to the filter ponds and treatment plant the District has four other reservoirs with a storage capacity of 1.95 million gallons. The Corbett Water District filters the water using a slow sand filtration process. The water is added to a filter pond that has a drain at the bottom, over the drain is layers of sand and gravel that filter debris and even organisms from the water. The water is then disinfected with sodium hypochlorite (chlorine) at a rate of one milligram per liter of water. This ensures that harmful bacteria and organisms in the water have been eliminated, and the water is safe to drink. Because of the acidic nature of our surface water, (conifer needles are quite acidic) soda ash is also added to raise the pH and adjust alkalinity level. This reduces the amount of corrosion in plumbing and metal surfaces of the reservoirs. Both processes meet the state and federal drinking water standards.

All of our customers live below our treatment center, and gravity is still the prevailing law of nature that we depend on. The energy efficient, gravity fed pipes fill with the pressure of built up water, which pushes the water down Larch Mountain and then up and over hills and into roughly 1080 businesses and homes.

At the treatment center we use a computer to monitor the different levels of Turbidity, Chlorine, and PH in the water and maintain levels based on State and Federal regulations. We also have an amazing machine that shows in a graph what is happening at all times with the water samples. The computers are set to specific limits which alert our staff (both day and night) to any number of potential issues.

In June of 2021, just as last year's budget was going to take effect, our District Manager, Tom Edwards, resigned, leaving a huge hole in the district leadership. From that time the board has cobbled together its existing staff and independent contractors to maintain the essential functions of providing,

clean safe drinking water to the residents of Corbett. The last few years have been challenging for the district. In 2017 the gorge forest fires highlighted that an alternative source of water would be very prudent for our district. The board and leadership of the time moved forward with finding an alternative source. Unfortunately the effort and funds used by the district were not fruitful in our attempt to drill a well and to this day we do not have a secondary source of safe clean drinking water. I believe that this should still be a priority for our district. If we had an endless supply of funds, there would be plans to invest more into ground water, this year.

In November I was hired as District Clerk, with the assumption that there was a District Manager who would be starting in December. Unfortunately the expected Manager decided not to take the job just a few days before he was scheduled to begin working here. The shoes that I have attempted to fill were big, our former District Clerk was also acting as Interim Manager and the need for direction here at the district is felt. As you can see in the budget the line item for District Manager has increased significantly, this is due to the challenges that the board has faced in procuring an experienced and dedicated manager to lead the district into the future.

When the board asked me to step up and take on the managerial duties of creating the budget and budget message, my first act was to get an inspection of the office building. After looking into what items have been budgeted for or completed for the upkeep and maintenance of the building, I noticed a severe lack of attention to this old building (it was purchased from the phone company in 1956 for \$1). The inspection report has helped me to determine where to start with keeping a roof over our heads. The 1970's era metal barn roofing was nailed onto exposed trusses, over an existing flat roof. The metal roof has been leaking and the water hasn't been noticeable because the majority has pooled on the flat roof above, or dripped down into the furnace. This budget prioritizes the roof and the heating system. If we have anything left for a generator I plan on upgrading the generator to a system that properly reflects the serious nature of staying open regardless of the weather etc.

If you have looked over the proposed budget sheets you will notice that the budget this year is over 150,000 lower than the one last year. This can be directly correlated to the Master Plan that was budgeted at 170,000 last year and a loan for 150,000 to pay for it. After taking into consideration both the timing in getting a loan and the existing talents of our current staff and auxiliary contractors, the board decided to produce this essential, required document, in house. We will be saving over 100,000 plus interest in this decision. When the plan is finished it will guide managers to come in what type of repairs, maintenance, and capital projects to prioritize. My intention is to support the board in being proactive and using the plan to improve and get ahead of problems that will inevitably come up.

Speaking of staying ahead of the curve, our filter ponds need new sand. When the sand was put in them we used local sand that no longer fits within the regulatory parameters. We can however clean what we have or just buy new sand that is already cleaned and to specifications (diameter, uniformity, fines, and acid solubility) . After some research we have decided that the most cost effective, and long lasting way to replace the sand, is to do one pond a year and bring the sand in from the closest sand supplier. The line item in this budget for “filter pond repair” is for one pond. Although this is a big project we kept it listed in “repairs and maintenance” rather than “capital outlay” as it isn’t a new capital project.

The staff here at the district works very well together, and even though we all have to wear 3-7 hats in any given week, we have tackled new and old problems as a team. The idea that we are all here at this time, with the limiting factors already discussed does not stop us from continuing to strive for excellence. The supply chain in the past 2 years has been severely disrupted. Because of this, the dump truck and mini-excavator are only now available. It is essential to our district to have skilled staff to do the majority of activities that are required to maintain the water system, water lines, building, treatment plant, computers, billing software, and the grounds. Furthermore the staff needs appropriate equipment, computers, vehicles, PPE, and other technology to function. With inflation rates at 7.7% and the need to keep workers who have history with the district, knowledge of the system, and know how to wear multiple hats in one day – we have focused on personnel in this budget. In years past the district has been forced to spend 10s of 1000s of dollars on contractors to do field work. However we feel that with the two vehicles that we expect to purchase in the next month, we will have the tools required to get the job done in house. Because of this we have reduced the line item for “mains and repair” from 67,000 to 15,000, and used the difference to help fund the hiring of a third utility worker. We have also doubled our education budget (from 3000 to 6000) hoping to enable the staff that we have and the ones that we hire to be skilled and knowledgeable. We have a lot of work ahead of us and I think we’re up to the challenge.

During these budget committee meetings you will hear words like “PRV – pressure reducing valves” , “Slow Sand filtration”, “pH”, “master plan” and “Net working Capital”. If you have any questions at all – please feel free to ask! We can all learn from each other, and there’s nothing worse than trying to digest and decide based on partial information. Thank you in advance for reading through this materiel, for discussing and deliberating the budget and for making wise and prudent decisions.

Yours,

Ana Linden

District Clerk/ Budget Officer

