

CITY MANAGER'S UPDATE

August 31, 2026

Message from the Manager:

Life 202

Raise your hand if you have ever watched the beloved movie *A Christmas Story*. That movie is one of my family's favorites at Christmas. How else would we learn that FRAGILE was Italian? What I have always understood so well from that movie was the main character Ralphie's obsession with the Red Ryder BB gun. Ralphie would lustfully say, "I want an official Red Ryder, carbine-action; two hundred shot range model air rifle, with a compass in the stock and this thing which tells time!" I can so relate to Ralphie, but it was not a Red Ryder BB gun for me, no sir, it was a circa 1978 Zebco 202 fishing rod and reel. You would have felt the same if you could have beheld it's sleek profile, dark green casing, cork handle and powerful fishing action! It was a real beaut of a fishing tool!

If you have ever watched Ralphie's plight in *A Christmas Story* you know that calamity struck on his first shot with this Red Ryder. The BB ricocheted back and broke Ralphie's glasses! Well young Mitchell had a very similar life experience. As I casted my Zebco 202 for the first time in the yard it's power was so much more than I could have imagined and I sent the small weight at the end high and long and over the powerlines along the street. My boy brain scenarios like why have I not been electrocuted were cut short as a semi-truck came down the road hooking my line. I remember the terror of watching as that truck raced off taking all of the line in my 202 with it! As Ralphie would exclaim ohhhhhh fudddggeeee!

I trudged back to the house where I fessed up to my father what I had done. Oh the spanking I just knew was waiting for me! I mean this was not some ordinary fishing rod I had damaged – it was a Zebco 202! I remember my Dad smiled and said no worry, we will just put some more line on it and all will be good.

Later in life it hit me that this was way more than a silly life story and more of a profound lesson. How often have you felt that you were emptied? Life throws many challenges at us and sometimes we feel we have given all we can. These challenges can be professional and personal. But just like that fishing reel, we can reline and continue on. What do you

remember about Thomas Edison? That he invented the light bulb? Yes, but did you know that he failed many, many times over years in his quest? His famous quote, *"I have not failed 10,000 times – I've successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work."* Edison understood Life 202 – he just respooled and continued on and was not remembered for failure but as a great inventor!

I know it's summer with a Texas heat dome that has been miserable. Being in public service can be thankless and tough many days. When we feel life is draining us remember we can always refill and continue on! How do you recharge? For me it's working outdoors or a day in the woods hunting or fishing. Whatever it is for you, make sure you take the time to Life 202! Thank you all for all you do in service to others.

David

"Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently." – **Henry Ford**

General Updates

New Hires:

Mathew Caldwell was hired for the position of Firefighter/EMT on August 17th

Arno Stemmer was re-hired for the position of Part Time Heavy Equipment Operator on August 18th

Jody Hodges was hired for the position of Light Equipment Operator on August 31st

Promotions:

Marcos Chico was promoted to the position of Water Maintenance Technician on August 1st

Ray Gandara was promoted to the position of Assistant Fire Chief on August 15th

Leslie Stevens was promoted to the position of Wastewater Superintendent on August 15th

Accomplishments:

Mark Hyde was awarded the 2026 Public Official of the Year from the Building Officers Association of Texas! Congrats Mark we are so proud of you!

August Kudos Award Winners: You all do such great work serving our public and each other! Congratulations to Chuck Adams and Massoud Howayeck. Many more to come!

Clyde's Crossword Challenge: This month's Clyde's Crossword Challenge winners were 1st Place – Nichole Ratliff 2nd Place – Leona Clay; and 3rd Place Lorissa Byse.

Sudoku Winner: This month's winner of the Sudoku Challenge was Kaily Funez-Lenon!

21 Day Elevate Challenge Winners: The winners of the 21 Day Elevate Challenge were: 1st Place Clyde Hicks, 2nd Place Betty Delong, and 3rd Place Cabrina Chase.

HH-N-GO: A new HH-N-GO bingo challenge began with the start of 2026! A new letter/number will be pulled each week and there are specific things to do for that letter/number if you have it on your card. There is a game card for employees and one for citizens. The game helps us to get to know our organization better and for our citizens it helps them get to know the City better. Contact HR for your bingo card! It's never too late to get a card and play! We congratulate our first citizen winner of the year – Katie Anderson and our first employee winner – Houston Johnson! I hear others have a bingo and are just completing the tasks so more winners to come!

The Spazmatics at First Fridays Music Series: The Spazmatics will lead us into our Fall programming for the First Friday's Music Series. The concert will be September 4 from 6 to 8

p.m. at the Carl Levin Park Amphitheater. Bring out a chair or blanket and enjoy a great concert. Food trucks and vendors will be present!

Library Programs: Our Library is full of great programs for the entire family to enjoy – make sure you check out the Library’s webpage for programs your family may have interest in. Trashy Art Club, Story Time, Childrens Book Club and Steam Time just to name a few of the programs incoming in September!

Kern Park Splash Pad: The Kern Park Splash Pad will be open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. through September 30th.

Spotlight on Service:

John Fox and Nick Gilveli Thanked: Police Chief Sonja Clay wrote to show her appreciation for Public Work’s John Fox and Nick Gilveli. Chief Clay wrote, *“I wanted to express my appreciation for the work John Fox and Nick Gilveli did in addressing our intersection debacle in Evergreen Estates. They were quick and efficient, which really reflects positively on your department. We asked for stop signs and before we could finish our request, the signs were already set up and installed. Kudos to them for their outstanding performance!”*

Pet Adoption Center Gives Hope: A citizen wrote to thank the Pet Adoption Center. The citizen stated, *“I am trying so hard to find a fluffy little Kitten for my 19 year old granddaughter that has a little medical issue. We have visited so many events and shelters. I want you to know that your adoption center is by far the absolute best. I felt the animals were all treated and cared for and you also cared about our hunt for that fluffy kitten. I think she stays with this fluffy Kitten decision when she set her heart on one in Erath county that was untruthful and broke her heart. I’m just a grandmother that loves and raised my granddaughter. And because of the love in your facility will be the ONLY place we continue to search due to the disturbing and surprising things we have experienced in our search. You all should be very proud of your facility. When I donate whatever I can, will definitely be to you. Thank you for giving us hope.”*

Sgt. Lonnie Clark is Considerate: A citizen wrote to express their appreciation for PD's Sgt. Lonnie Clark. The citizen wrote, *"I was pulled over for a traffic violation this morning and had the pleasure to interact with Sergeant Clark of the Harker Heights P.D. Although it is of no consequence to my failing to keep within the speed limit, I had just received some devastating news at my doctor's office... and so poor Sgt Clark had to witness my breakdown... a 76 yr old woman crying is not a pretty sight, and yet he was kind, considerate and caring, while still doing his job in a respectful manner. We unfortunately live in a world full of anger and hatred. People are too quick to complain, and yet slow to commend. I fervently hope that I never have reason to be pulled over by an officer again. But I can honestly say that Sgt. Clark is a credit to your department. Please thank him again for his kindness to an old lady who had just received an awful diagnosis."*

Nate Trimble and Marcos Chico Represent: A citizen was so happy with the work of Public Work's Nate Trimble and Marcos Chico they wrote the following, *"I would like to thank and commend the maintenance crew who responded today to repair the water meter leak. They were both professional and efficient and were able to address the issue. The two man crew who were here are a good representation of the city and should be recognized for their hard work."*

John Leivan and Johnny Widener Appreciated: PAC's Shiloh Wester wrote to thank Parks' John Leivan and PAC's Johnny Widener. Shiloh wrote, *"I want to take a moment to thank John Leivan and Johnny Widener for building the shed that PAC was able to purchase through grant funding that will provide much needed storage for traps. This was no small undertaking and we are very appreciative of their hard work and carpentry skills!"*

Nichole Ratliff Goes Above and Beyond: PAC's Shiloh Wester wrote to give thanks for HR's Nichole Ratliff. Shiloh wrote, *"I also want to thank Nichole Ratliff for helping me out with a fairly urgent situation last week. She went above and beyond to get me the information we needed to get the situation resolved, and I'm very grateful for her willingness to help. Thanks Nichole!"*

Julie Helsham and Ursula Paddie Step Up: HR Director Leona Clay was very appreciative of assistance from Julie Helsham and Ursula Paddie. Leona wrote, *"I wanted to give you both a huge shoutout for helping with the phones and walk-ins yesterday! Unfortunately,*

due to an unforeseen circumstance, a third of my staff was out of the office. I truly appreciate you both stepping in, being so kind, and helping us get through the day. Your support was greatly appreciated!"

Sgt Lonnie Clark Commended: A citizen wrote to thank PD's Sgt. Lonnie Clark. The citizen wrote, *"I am writing to commend one of your officers for his professionalism, kindness, and respectful conduct during a traffic stop on August 5, 2026...I was traveling from Lampasas and was unfamiliar with the area. I was stopped for speeding and received only a warning. What stood out to me was not the warning itself, but the officer's calm, respectful, and professional demeanor from the moment he approached my vehicle. He spoke to me with kindness, without being accusatory or intimidating, and treated me with genuine respect. He had no way of knowing that I struggle with depression, anxiety, and panic attacks. His calm approach made all the difference. Because of the way he handled the stop, I remained calm and did not experience the panic attack that could easily have occurred. Too often, people only contact law enforcement agencies to complain. I wanted to take the time to recognize an officer who represents your department with professionalism, compassion, and respect. His conduct left a lasting positive impression on me, and I am sincerely grateful. Please extend my heartfelt thanks to Officer Clark and let him know that his professionalism and kindness did not go unnoticed. Officers like him make a real difference in the community."*

Richelle Otero Helps Out: A citizen wrote a letter to thank Planning's Richelle Otero for her help. The citizen wrote that Richelle was sweet, kind, and compassionate in their interactions with her and was able to assist with their need.

Houston Johnson Partners: Admin's Houston Johnson assisted the Texas Police Chiefs Association (TCPA) recently. TPCA Executive Director Gene Ellis wrote to show some appreciation for Houston. Director Ellis wrote, *"I wanted to express my sincere appreciation for you allowing Houston Johnson to assist us on a project to help the families of fallen officers. Since its inception, the TPCA Foundation Fallen Officer Fund has provided over \$1.4 million in support to the families of fallen officers killed in the line of duty in Texas. During a period from July of 2013 through the fall of 2014, Chief Mike Gentry and I delivered 4 benefit checks in Bell County to surviving family members of fallen officers. One of them was to the widow of Killeen Officer Bobby Hornsby (EOW: 7/14/13). Thanks to Houston, we were able to re-connect with Kimberly Hornsby Wagner who agreed to assist us in making a*

short film about the impact the Fallen Officer Fund has on the surviving family members. Houston served as a liaison with Kimberly and made her trip back to Texas easier and he was a phenomenal asset to the entire TPCA Executive Board during our meetings in Ft. Worth with this project. We truly appreciate the value the City of Harker Heights puts in being great partners in the region and around the state.”