

Harrah prepares for unprecedented growth

By Ryan Horton
Managing Editor

Harrah is seeing plenty of growth, and city officials expect that to increase as construction of the turnpike nears completion.

City officials say houses in Harrah are already selling faster than they can be built, and they expect a population boom with many hoping to become commuters from eastern Oklahoma County utilizing the new toll road that will connect Interstate 40 and I-44.

"It's an exciting time to be in Harrah. Obviously, I'm new and have only been here about six months. With the turnpike coming in there's a lot going on in Harrah. It's always a challenge to keep your rates low, while providing quality service to your citizens. We have been fortunate with sales tax continuing to climb. People are shopping in Harrah, and the population is growing," said Harrah City manager Clayton Lucas. "We have a new addition, River Mist, doing dirt work now. That'll be about 275 new homes going in. Fall Creek is about a year away from completion and that's another few hundred homes there. And there are a number of smaller developments being worked on. We had a developer come in just the other day who is looking at three large pieces of land to do three more large subdivisions. You're going to continue to see that. These builders are having trouble getting these homes framed before they're sold. They're literally selling them as fast as they can frame them."

The estimates at the last census, 2010, had Harrah at 5,000.

The estimated population in 2017 was 6,311 and in just that short amount of time officials believe it's gone up significantly.

"As the turnpike work progresses so have the calls we get on a regular



Harrah Mayor Larry Fryar and City Manager Clayton Lucas discuss the rapid growth and development in Harrah. PHOTO BY RYAN HORTON

basis about retail development and our industrial park. I'm averaging two calls every 10 days to two weeks. We have a large number of national retailers looking at Harrah. It's interesting to watch their site visits. We have a couple big announcements that I feel are huge for Harrah coming soon," said Lucas. "A lot of these national retailers don't want the word out until everything is official so I'm on some nondisclosure agreements. But I can say we have several national retailers seriously interested in Harrah."

Lucas believes the City Council is dedicated to improving the living standard in Harrah, and that begins with boosting sales tax revenue.

With a limited budget the city is racing to get infrastructure improved as the nearby turnpike work continues.

"Our city council has done creative

and active things. For example the city purchased some property that could be used for commercial development. We didn't do this to make a profit off the land, but instead to get retailers in there to boost our sales tax revenue," said Lucas.

"We know there's going to be an interchange at Luther and NE 23rd. We don't have sewer there right now. According to our engineer it will cost \$2.2 million to get sewer there from where we currently have it, less than a mile away. Well, that's a problem for a city with a \$3 million budget. We're in

the process of getting some equipment so we can handle these jobs ourselves. Our city engineer will act as the project manager and DEQ will be on site to ensure it's done right. We are going to start actively and aggressively laying sewer lines throughout Harrah. We plan to start in July with the

objective of getting to Luther Road and then Triple X soon after. It'll be phased, and bringing the work in house will help. We're paying the labor regardless for our employees and if we buy the materials it's about \$400,000. That's compared to a \$2.2 million project if we contract it out."

Mayor Larry Fryar is thankful to have Lucas on board as the city prepares to experience record-setting growth.

"With everything happening right now people are going to be surprised by the next census. I don't know what it's going to be, but people will be surprised. I hope our schools can keep up with the growth we're having and about to have," said Fryar.

"When we heard the turnpike was coming we had some rough meetings. You feel bad for the people, especially the ones who homesteaded there and everything. But people don't understand when a turnpike or ODOT comes through the only thing we can do as a city is make sure they don't come through our businesses, schools and cemeteries."

Fryar believes Harrah is moving the right direction, and credits that to dedicated city staff.

"It was a blessing to have Earl Burson as our city manager for 13 years. He was a mentor to me, and kept me out of a lot of trouble. The minute we interviewed Clayton I knew he was the guy we needed. He hit the ground running and doesn't slow down," said Fryar.

"It's a good time to be in Harrah right now. A lot of people are coming to Harrah from out of state, because they're just tired of taxes and other costs of living other places. I've been the mayor for what feels like forever. I was a councilman before that and have lived in Harrah all my life. I love Harrah, and right now we can build our city the way we want to build it. It's time to do it the way we want to do it."

