

Blanchard continues to thrive despite recent challenges

By Traci Chapman

It hasn't been an easy 12 months by any standards, but the city of Blanchard is holding its own – and more, despite a global pandemic and some revenue glitches.

"We're happy with where we are, when it's all said and done," City Manager Robert Floyd said. "We've certainly had our challenges, our difficulties, but we also have several good things on the horizon."

That includes the Monday announcement of a new Blanchard Braum's, the city manager said. It's the second restaurant to be located within the city's TIF District No. 1.

Blanchard created its first TIF district in 2015, and Taco Bell was the first business to come into the city as a result, Floyd said. Tax Increment Financing, or TIF, districts are an economic development tool which allows entities to utilize local funds to finance certain development costs. It's a fairly widely used resource that allows for economic development that might not otherwise be possible, officials said.

While Braum's has procured a property for its new location, the company has not yet announced where it is specifically located or provided a timeline for its opening, which is a usual process with new business development, the city manager said.

Other commercial development is also on the horizon, Floyd said – a two-phase commercial project is slated for Highway 76 and 10th Street. The almost 6,000 square foot first phase is comprised of a two-story building expected to feature four ground floor retail and four residential units on the second floor, the city manager said.



Blanchard City Manager Robert Floyd, far right, and his staff. The city has thrived despite challenges imposed by COVID-19.

Blanchard's Domino's Pizza also is remodeling, and the city is preparing for its new Blanchard Veterans Memorial, to be located near the recently built O'Reilly Auto Parts, Floyd said. That memorial is expected to begin construction around Veteran's Day this year; so far, the city has raised about \$100,000 in donations of the \$300,000 anticipated cost.

Another development was in part sidelined by the novel coronavirus pandemic, Floyd said – a planned steak house was at least put on hold due to COVID-19. A second new business, expected to offer ice cream and pastries, was planned in the foreseeable future.

Financially, the city has fared COVID-19 relatively well, Floyd said – sales tax has remained strong, while use taxes have lagged. Those taxes in great part were adversely impacted by the ravages experienced by Oklahoma's oil and gas industry statewide.

Lower use tax means less ability to conduct major road projects, although the city manager said Blanchard was able to oil and chip about 26 miles of roads last year, thanks to a build-up of use tax over time.

"We would have preferred to improve the roads, but we just don't have the funding at this time with the lower use tax," Floyd said.

Residentially, Blanchard is also moving forward, the city manager said. City Council just approved a fourth section of Oasis Ranch, comprised of 27 lots. Officials also approved zoning for a 25-acre tract with about 22 lots, while "someone is looking at another 60 acres," Floyd said.

The city continues its growth – the 2020 census showed population topping 9,500 – compared to the 7,670 residents listed in the 2010 U.S. Census.

"We're looking at about 21% growth, which is encouraging," Floyd said. "By 2030, we're sure we're going to get over that 10,000 mark."