

*ICMA's Strategic Leadership and Governance Award recognizes the innovative local government programs or processes that have significantly affected a local government organization's culture or strategic direction. This year, ICMA presents the award in the less-than-10,000 population category to the city of Burley, Idaho, and City Administrator Mark A. Mitton, for Infrastructure Planning.*



MARK A. MITTON

Burley, Idaho, is a full-service city, providing water, sewer, refuse, police, fire, electrical, and other services to the community. But soon after Mark Mitton

was hired as Burley's city administrator in 1998, he toured the city's facilities and was surprised to find a great lack of planning, especially for infrastructure. Within three months of his hire, he set about tackling the worst of the problems: the city's wastewater treatment plant. He put out a request for qualifications for engineering services, procured services, and set about developing long-range planning for the city's utilities. After engineers developed a wastewater facilities plan and an environmental study for the new wastewater plant, Mr. Mitton took on the responsibility of master plans for traffic and street improvement and for the water system. He also directed the electrical distribution utility to create a capital improvement plan.

To fund these master plans, Mr. Mitton chose not to raise utility rates but rather to obtain grants. Thus, grants from the state covered \$24,670 of the \$29,183 needed for the traffic and streets master plan and \$24,400 of the \$30,600 needed for the water master plan. The real challenge, however, was to get the \$28 million wastewater engineering and construction project funded. For this

Mr. Mitton put together a plan that included a local revenue bond (\$18 million), a general obligation bond (\$4.9 million), and federal appropriations/grants (\$5.15 million).

The federal grant portion of the wastewater treatment project, which comprised State and Tribal Assistance Grants as well as grants from the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, paid for the facility planning study, the environmental study, engineering, construction management, and start-up and performance management of the new plant. To match these funds, the city raised its wastewater fees five years before construction began in order to prefund and also match state and federal funding. Mr. Mitton worked many additional hours on writing requests for federal appropriations and preparing for the revenue bond and general obligation elections. The strategic thinking and planning that went into the process inspired great community buy-in from the chamber of commerce and other groups to support the revenue and general obligation bonds.

The city also established a new fee schedule for wastewater services, which prefunded loan reserves and other improvements that the project would require. Many public hearings were held to educate the public on the necessity of the wastewater plant improvements, and for about a year Mr. Mitton updated the city council at every meeting to get the local news to cover the project.



**Using grant money to fund a 20-year master plan for its water system**

While the wastewater project was ongoing, Mr. Mitton proceeded with a streets and traffic master plan to identify areas in need of major improvements. With a grant from the state of Idaho, the Department of Transportation, and the local transportation committee, this project resulted in street improvements and a direction for future projects, such as the rebuilding of State Highway 27 from the Interstate 84 exit to the Overland Bridge. This project is scheduled to be completed in 2008 with 90 percent of the project paid for through state and federal funding.

In October 2001, the city of Burley applied for and received a grant to fund a 20-year master plan for its water system. Two major improvements—large water line upgrades to serve one quadrant of the city—have already been completed, and a third—a new well and a two-million-gallon storage facility to provide needed storage capacity and redundancy for hot summer conditions—is already under way. Mr. Mitton proposed the fee schedules to fund these capital projects, and he keeps the community up-to-date on the fees needed for future capital improvement and operational costs.

Through leadership and strategic planning, the city of Burley has made  
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giant strides. Now, rather than make do with existing equipment or infrastructure that is long past its planned life, the city actually plans for the future and stays ahead of the changes that are coming.