

# Pressure Put On By The State

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Grissom said his first knowledge of the situation came at a board meeting when the commissioners received a letter from the Utilities Commission "telling us the would have a board down here and review the gas line. Then (after the hearing) we got a notice that said get it done.

"They could really take over the gas system if we don't get it done," Grissom said. "They made the hint that they could fine us if we didn't get it done, but as I remember, they didn't say how much they would fine us.

"The Utilities Commission has really gotten strict lately," Grissom added. "You can't let things go anymore. You can't put off until tomorrow what should have been done two weeks ago. They just won't stand for it. And that's the way it ought to be. I don't have any qualms with it, it just costs a lot of money."

Commissioner Jim Dickey said he had heard of the problems "ever since I've been back on the board (almost four years). It's been a lingering thing, and I really don't know why.

"The State just doesn't fool with you anymore," he said. "They're pretty strict on these things. I just thank God we're going on with it. These things are nice but you have to keep them up."

Commissioner Corbet Nicholson said he did not know about the problem until the last year to year and a half, and that first he knew of any pressure from the Utilities Commission was at the same board meeting Grissom talked about.

"I feel like our gas consultant didn't follow up on it like he should have," Nicholson said. "They were getting on us pretty hot and it should have been taken care of much sooner."

Commissioner Humes Houston and Commissioner Norman King could not be reached for comment.

Mayor Moss said he tried to delay the new line as long as possible, because it is costly, and that he felt the old line was satisfactory.

"Their contention was that a new line would equalize gas pressure throughout the city, and in the long run, they're correct," Moss said. "But I was not in a hurry to spend that kind of money. But when they ordered us to do it, we complied."

Moss said the standards for gas systems are "much more stringent than years ago when the current system was installed (it was installed in the 1950's), and it means a program of upgrading lines and monitoring regulator stations for safety and meters for accuracy."

But, most of the gas line problems will soon be behind the city. Work is scheduled to begin on the new \$222,000, 2.5 mile line within the next two weeks and should be completed by September 30.

It will, as has been noted, equalize the pressure throughout town and provide better services for the customers. But it will continue to be costly.

The city has already put out thousands of dollars for safety protection, and because of another Utilities Commission suggestion which has been approved by the board of commissioners, it will continue to pay out thousands through high salaries.

The Utilities Commission, and the city's consulting engineer, suggested that the gas department become a separate department from public works and be completely re-organized. A salary scale was also suggested, and adopted, with salaries ranging from \$11,500 a year for linemen to \$19,500 for the superintendent. The board budgeted \$104,439 for seven employees. Last year's estimated budget was \$78,025 and the actual budget for salaries was \$50,523.

Jimmy Manley, former gas superintendent for Bessemer City, has been hired as the new superintendent.

Dixon says low salaries and lack of equipment were two of the city's biggest problems in the gas department over the past 10 years.

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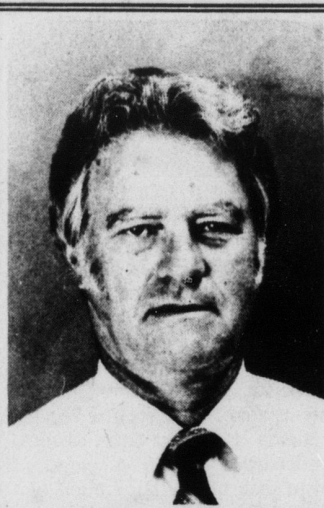
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