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School eyes third cooperative tax for technical, vocational programs

by Jonathan Green

The Hot Springs County School Board has authority to levy special taxes of one-half mill for each educational cooperative the district participates in without putting the tax to a popular vote, district business manager Lisa Pearce said.

The district currently participates in two cooperatives and levies a combined three-quarter mill for them.

One-half mill goes to the Northwest Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), which provides help for challenged youths who cannot attend regular school. The Big Horn Basin Children's Center, east of Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital, is run by the cooperative.

Another one-quarter mill is levied for the Fremont County Board of Cooperative Higher Education (FC BOCHES).

That cooperative provides dual credit classes for Hot Springs County High School students through Central Wyoming College.

The district will also begin participating in the Fremont County BOCHES in the 2009-10 academic year, according to Pearce and superintendent secretary Kelly Andreen.

Fremont County BOCHES offers technical and vocational training for high school students, such as certified nursing assistant and firefighter certification programs. The cooperative also works with energy companies to provide an industry supported program.

The board will consider what, if any, additional tax to levy for Fremont County BOCHES this summer.

The school board votes on the special levies, but the county collects the tax and passes it directly through to the cooperatives, Pearce said.

State statute indicates such levies "shall be determined on the basis of a predetermined formula based upon a participating district's total enrollment... The assessment shall raise only the necessary funds to meet the financial requirements of programs and services offered."

The one mill levy for the recreation district, authorized by the school board, is also a pass-through item in the school budget.

Geis: Smoking bill opposed here

by Karla Pomeroy

House Bill 31, which would prohibit smoking in most public places in the state, was sent to the Senate last week for introduction but as of Tuesday morning had not been assigned to a committee.

Senator Gerald Geis (R-Worland) said the bill likely would be assigned to the Rules Committee.

He said if the bill comes out of committee he did not expect huge debates like there were in the House.

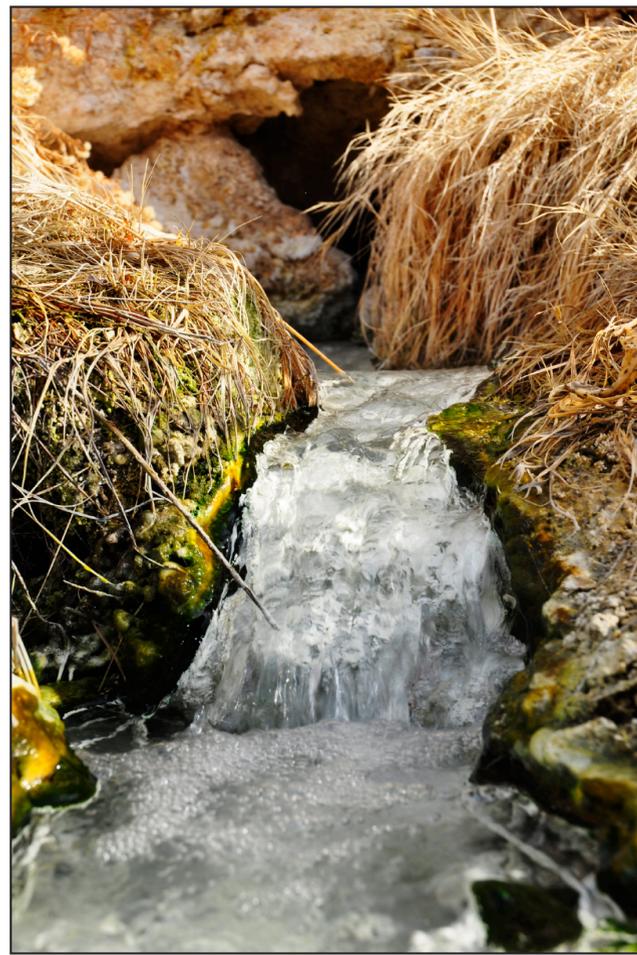
"I doubt if it will pass. Too many people feel it's infringing on private rights," Geis said Monday.

He said the heaviest communication about the bill he has received has been from Hot Springs County, with about 75%

of the e-mails and comments on the voter hotline asking Geis to vote against HB31.

He said in north Big Horn County, which is out of his Senate District, about 70% of the comments are asking Geis to support the bill.

He said he has not heard much from his constituents in south Big Horn County or Washakie County.



Outlined by green moss, hot mineral water flows from the White Sulfur Spring, also known as the Green Eyed Monster, into the Big Horn River on the north edge of Hot Springs State Park on Monday. —Jonathan Green photo

Bank to sell its branch in Casper?

The Casper branch of Bank of Wyoming will apparently be acquired by Platte Valley Bank of Torrington.

According to a public notice in this newspaper, Platte Valley is seeking permission from the Federal Reserve Board to purchase the assets and liabilities of the branch at 3131 Wyoming Boulevard in Casper.

Bank of Wyoming in Thermopolis has been operating under special rules from state and federal regulators, and the sale of the branch would presumably solve some of the liquidity problems involved.

Six nominees announced

The annual Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce banquet is scheduled March 14 at the fair building.

The theme is Paradise: Thermopolis Style. The 2008 business and citizen of the year will be announced.

The citizen nominees are Ann Hardesty, Mark Whitt and Dorothy Milek.

Businesses nominated are Nature's Corner, KTHE Radio and Wyoming Pioneer Home.

Engineers and property owners discuss the first Lane 3 drawings for improvements and possible loop to Lane 7

by Pat Schmidt

A preliminary look at improvements to Lane 3 and a link to Lane 7 on Thursday unveiled more questions than answers.

In fact, several property owners agreed to point out problems on Lane 3 to Grant Sanders of Inberg-Miller Engineers and Harry Hughes of Owl Creek Engineering five days later.

Hot Springs County planner Lee Campbell had several questions about Sanders' preliminary design. He was most concerned Sanders was using a road width less than the 60 feet required by the county.

Sanders and John Zupan, who owns Zupan Electric on the south side of the road next to U.S. Highway 20, pointed out that adjacent structures and the Pamida parking lot make it difficult to have a full size road.

One of the current problems is the steep

grade up from the highway. To gain a more gentle slope, Sanders offered two alternatives, one cutting two to four feet from the road gradually and the other with a curved entrance from the north using a little more of the Pamida property. The latter would move away from the shaded area and allow sunlight to help thaw winter ice.

Sanders and others attending the meeting agreed the cut would make it difficult for some property owners to gain access to their lots from the lowered Lane 3.

Other business owners participating were father and son, Tom E. and Tom J. Ryan of Ryan Brothers Trucking and Paul Galovich of B&G Industries.

County commission chairman Brad Basse also participated in much of the discussion. As part of the project, the road would become a

county road.

Sanders broke the project into three sections but said the first two could easily be combined:

Phase 1: 400 feet from the highway west to the back edge of the Pamida property. Estimate: \$280,000.

Phase 2: The next 980 feet west to the Galovich and Ryan properties. Estimate: \$415,000-\$470,000.

Phase 3: A loop generally to the south to link up with Lane 7. Estimate: \$1 million.

Sanders said the estimated costs are very preliminary and do not include engineering, right-of-way acquisition and utilities expenses such as moving power poles if needed. He said his work was focused on qualifying for matching funds from state and federal sources.

He recommended concrete be used on Phase 1 and either asphalt or concrete on the remain-

der. Sanders said concrete would withstand the starting and stopping of trucks and resist rutting more than asphalt.

There was also discussion whether the loop should be built as a less expensive gravel road.

Sanders reported on his preliminary interviews with property owners in the area. Concerns expressed about ponding in the area prompted special steps to place drains at several points and slope the road to get rid of storm water.

Other research prompted him to estimate 800 vehicles a day would use the new road with an increase to 1,200 over 20 years.

Sanders said some of the questions from the 15 people attending the meeting were outside the scope of Inberg-Miller's contract with the county and would have to be answered in later stages.



Playing the "gossiping women" in the skit, Lincoln the Man-Lincoln the Legacy, are Barbara Moeller, left, and Lily Hayes. The performance was part of the 200th birthday party celebrating Abraham Lincoln at the Hot Springs County Museum and Cultural Center.

Don't mention money

Finding a building still a goal for community recycling team

by Jonathan Green

After months of slow progress and setbacks, the community recycling task force members thought they had caught a break in their search for a building.

Alas, it was a misunderstanding.

Chairwoman Toni Casciato, also a town council member, lamented the latest development had sent the group "back to square one."

A number of properties had been mentioned but were rejected for one reason or another. The most promising prospect was when Hot Springs County superintendent Marty Kobza offered the temporary use of the Lucerne school, only to find the doors into the building to be too small.

And then the state military began negotiating the transfer of the armory to a joint powers board consisting of the town of Thermopolis, Hot Springs County and the recreation district. At the recycling meeting Monday, the group decided to petition for use of the maintenance

shop behind the armory. There was palatable excitement at the meeting, as task force members crafted language for the petition and sample letters they would offer supporters.

By early Tuesday afternoon, Casciato learned the maintenance building was not included in the deal. Hot Springs State Park officials moved in several years ago and use the facility for upkeep of various park resources.

"Two steps forward, three steps back," she said Tuesday.

Casciato said she had spoken with Bill Aldridge of Belvedere Property Management of New York City, who told her the group funneled investments into Hot Springs County and encouraged her to send him a detailed proposal for a building.

Monday, Casciato told the task force a basic building would cost about \$40,000, according to estimates. The structure would need to accommodate a machine to compact and bale recyclables and provide a path for vehicles to enter, unload and drive out.

Casciato said she forwarded details about such a building to Aldridge and hoped the company might help finance it, but such a likelihood was "iffy."

The task force also discussed the possibility the state will subsidize recycling with the opening of new regional landfills. Since the new landfills will be fewer and further apart and fees will be based on weight, Casciato said, some of the financial difficulties would be mitigated.

A long discussion focused on the revenue neutral nature of the current recycling proposal, but Casciato told the task force a financial argument was a non-starter for many.

"Mention money" and the discussion is over before it starts, she said.

The group agreed it would be better to have a program in place prior to the regional landfills, as even state subsidized recycling would ultimately be a cost borne by Hot Springs County residents.

That goal will have to wait, for now.