

Joint meeting held

Center, landfill discussed by town, county leaders

by Jonathan Green

A vigorous work session, attended by the Hot Springs County commissioners, members of the Greater Learning Foundation and State Rep. Lorraine Quarberg preceded the Thermopolis Town Council meeting Tuesday.

The 90-minute work session was convened to discuss the proposed Big Horn Basin Science and Discovery Center and the possible formation of a solid waste district. The meeting seemed to raise more issues than it solved.

Discovery Center

The Legislature approved a one-time award of \$100,000 for “funding the project planning for the (discovery center) to be located on state park land near the entrance to Hot Springs State Park” earlier this year.

The three-page bill requires the town and county to form a joint powers board “for purposes of constructing and managing the” center and to enter into a lease agreement with the state for the land before the money will be released.

The project planning study “must convince the Legislature to part with several million dollars,” town lawyer Mike Messenger said.

“The \$100,000 appropriation is for the purpose of funding the project planning and there will be a lot of technical aspects to the project planning which will be beyond the scope of those employed by the town and county,” he wrote in a memo dated May 8.

Council members Dick Hall and Allen Braaten asked Greater Learning Foundation members Sue Blakey and Toddi Darlington how the center would raise sufficient money to operate.

Blakey said the foundation has already spent over \$100,000 to develop a business plan and over \$300,000 for other aspects of the center. She said the center would be somewhat dependent on grants and gifts, although revenues from the convention center would be the “main” source of funds and the education center would be the “strongest” source of funds.

Blakey said the planning process would need to address the possibility a stand-alone convention center will be constructed in Thermopolis.

Mayor Bill Malloy and Stansill seemed to have the strongest objections to the town assuming liability for the center, although Malloy said he supports the proposal if the town can eliminate financial concerns.

Hot Springs County commissioners Brad Basse, John Lumley and Frank Manning voiced strong support for the facility.

Stansill asked how the foundation expected to fund operations, especially in times of economic crisis. Blakey indicated an endowment would provide support.

Stansill said the wax museum had also had an

endowment but ended up costing the town over \$100,000. Blakey said the Greater Learning Foundation endowment would be different.

Stansill said the proposed center was a “great project” but was slated for the “worst place in town.” The land selected for the center is flood plain and also the point of town storm sewer discharges. The parking lot will flood.”

Councilwoman Toni Casciato said, “I was encouraged. Anything we can think of negative ... (Greater Learning Foundation members have) already heard it.”

Malloy responded, “I’m not negative, I’m all for it. Don’t get me wrong.”

The council asked Blakey to return when a draft joint powers agreement is prepared, at which point council members will consider the issue further.

Landfill discussion

The commissioners then heard a request from the town council that the county consider forming a solid waste disposal district.

Currently the town operates the landfill on West Sunnyside Lane. Thermopolis residents pay fees in their monthly town bill for collection and disposal.

Residents in East Thermopolis and Kirby pay for collection and disposal in a similar fashion, with the disposal fee passed on to Thermopolis.

The county commission pays about \$70,000-\$75,000 to Thermopolis for landfill operations and an additional \$56,000 to the reserve fund, county clerk Hans Odde said.

Rural residents who privately contract for garbage pickup are charged twice, Lumley claimed. Lumley also pays a private firm, BW Waste, a fee each month to collect his garbage.

Stansill said the fees collected by BW Waste cover only collection. Direct county payments to the town pay for disposal.

Stansill also said forming a district would free up the \$126,000-\$131,000 the county currently pays to the town to operate the landfill, as the district would be responsible for raising that money through tax levies and use fees.

The council and commission members tried to decipher state statute regarding solid waste disposal districts. A key issue is whether the district can simultaneously levy a tax (of up to three mills) while also collecting use fees.

Basse asked the council to produce precise numbers about the cost of operating the landfill and said he wanted a basis “to hang my hat on” before creating a new board with the potential to raise property taxes an additional three mills.

The council members agreed, and engineer Heath Overfield said the state-mandated study currently being produced by Inberg-Miller Engineers would provide cost figures for closer study.



Two girls make a splash at the Teepee Pool Thursday afternoon.

—Jonathan Green photo

Student count still up

Enrollment in Hot Springs County schools ended the year at 646 youngsters on June 1, up from 643 on May 30 a year ago.

There were 661 children in September at the start of the school year and 650 just a month ago on May 1.

If everything remains the same, the biggest class next year will be the fifth grade, which had 62 students at the end of this year. The smallest class would be the seventh grade with 39.

The enrollment by grade on June 1:

Kindergarten: 40 students.

First grade: 56.

Second grade: 57.

Third grade: 44.

Fourth grade: 62.

Fifth grade: 49.

Sixth grade: 39.

Seventh grade: 55.

Eighth grade: 54.

Ninth grade: 52.

Tenth grade: 49.

Eleventh grade: 44.

Twelfth grade: 45.

The enrollment by building next fall would be:

Elementary school, grades K-4: 197 plus however many enroll in kindergarten.

Middle school, grades 5-8: 205.

High school, grades 9-12: 199.

Commission ponders Lane 3, runway, shop

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners were given the final report on potential upgrades to Lane 3 south of Thermopolis at their Tuesday meeting.

Other business included sealing the airport runway, tabling a gravel pit proposal, considering roadwork and plans for improvements at the county shop.

Lane 3

Harry Hughes of Owl Creek Engineering and Grant Sanders of Inberg-Miller Engineers said a few comments came to them from the draft report that resulted in changes in the final plan.

One is the addition of a sidewalk on the north side of the lane. The Wyoming Department of Transportation suggested the addition in a letter dated May 14. An editorial in the May 7 Independent Record suggested the same sidewalk addition.

“We are really happy that we were able to work face to face with the stakeholders along Lane 3,” Sanders said.

He felt the second public meeting was a great help in letting the engineering firms know what the people in the area really wanted.

Phases 1 and 2 of the project would cost an estimated \$1.2 million to complete, taking the lane to the west end of the Ryan Brother’s property.

Phase 3, which would connect Lane 3 with Lane 7 would cost just over \$1 million.

“Phase 3 is full blown, paved, with utilities, so the cost is high,” said Hughes. “County road and bridge could probably do a gravel road a lot cheaper to start with.”

Potential funding options were presented.

“In theory you could fund the entire project with grant money, minus the acquisition of rights-of-ways,” Hughes said.

The report is available in the county clerk’s office.

Runway sealing

GDA Engineering presented a cost estimate to the commissioners for sealing nearly 20 miles worth of cracks, 105,000 feet, on the county airport runway.

The Wyoming Department of Transportation has agreed the runway must be resurfaced this year but told the commissioners the cracks in the runway have to be sealed before the resurfacing. The cost of sealing the cracks amounts to nearly \$80,000.

The county’s portion will be 20%, or \$15,910.

The three commissioners voted unanimously to proceed with the project.

Tonn gravel pit

The commissioners voted to table any action on the proposed land use change requested by Terry Tonn for a gravel pit on his property near the Owl Creek highway until the May 16 meeting.

Several of Tonn’s neighbors attending the Tuesday meeting said they were not aware they needed to attend the public meeting held May 19. The group requested they be allowed to comment, and board chairman Brad Basse opened the meeting for brief comments.

He explained the commissioners are only deciding on a land use change, not whether or not Tonn puts in a gravel pit.

“We need to know if putting stipulations on the land use change is within our legal jurisdiction,” Basse said.

He said all the steps have been followed, but the commissioners are still faced with conflicting evidence and opinions.

“I’m not sure we can do anything other than recommend or not recommend the land use change,” commissioner Frank Manning said.

County planner Lee Campbell will invite the state engineer to the next commission meeting to comment on the matter.

“We need input from the county attorney,” Basse said. “We need to see paperwork. We need proof, one way or another.”

Test patches for roads

County road and bridge will lay a couple of test patches on Missouri Flat road next week before starting work on 4 Mile Road, Cottonwood and Lane 7. The three projects consist of around 15 miles of roadway.

“We need to develop some kind of policy on cattle guards,” road and bridge employee Ray Shaffer said. “They make plowing roads difficult, and we’re getting a lot of them in these subdivisions.”

He said other counties are working on subdivision policies regarding cattle guards. One option apparently is fences with gates.

County shop

The commissioners also looked at the proposed building by Roy Decker that was designed for road and bridge. The package from Decker is not complete and there is some question about whether or not a sprinkler system will be needed in the building.

The commissioners voted to table anything further on the proposal until it is finalized.



Wyoming Congresswoman Cynthia Lummis (R-At Large) visits with area Republican Party boosters at the annual Lincoln Day Dinner at Red Cliffs Steak and Seafood Friday. Clockwise from the Congresswoman is Phyllis Baker, Charles Curley. Tom Anderson and Mike Baker.

—Jonathan Green photo

Police: unlocked cars targeted

by Jonathan Green

At least four or five vehicles were burglarized last week, according to Thermopolis police chief Mark Nelson.

Nelson emphasized most, if not all, of the vehicles were unlocked.

Car stereos, satellite radio receivers and a pair of binoculars were reported stolen.

The rash of burglary incidents began early on

May 27, according to the police chief.

Most of the thefts were reported that morning. Nelson said no arrests have been made.

The chief suggested everyone keep their vehicles locked and avoid storing valuable items inside.

If that can’t be helped, anything of value should be stashed out of sight.

Anyone with information about the thefts should call 864-3114.