

Pact signed for study on senior center

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners on Feb. 2 signed an agreement with TSP Inc. of Sheridan to complete a senior center feasibility project for the county.

In addition, the commissioners received environmental approval for a new airport and reviewed the county's annual audit.

The \$28,500 contract with TSP Inc. will cover a variety of services, including choosing the proper size for a new senior center based on demographics, space and function objectives and future growth potential. In addition, the company will determine a location and infrastructure availability, site development and floor plans along with a projected budget for the center and possible funding sources.

The contract was reviewed by county attorney Jerry Williams before signing and found to be a standard agreement.

Michael Wright with the accounting firm of Koerwitz, Michel, Wright and Asso. presented the county's annual audit to the commissioners, finding no deficiencies or non-compliance within their testing.

Two issues need to be addressed in internal controls, however.

The accounting firm found that some county departments are paying employees for paid time off differently from other departments. The report said if the county continues to allow and accrue these hours, there is a risk of the county over-compensating employees. It suggests the county address the policy and attempt to make paid time off policies consistent in all departments.

During its testing, the firm discovered a construction invoice that had been paid in duplicate.

Although the duplicate payment was quickly refunded by the vendor, Wright recommended the county survey its policies and procedures with expenditure processing to ensure effective controls are in place to prevent duplicate payments in the future.

Statement gives proposed airport ability to take off

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County commissioners have received a "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI) statement from the Department of Transportation's Federal Aviation Administration for the proposed airport site west of Thermopolis.

The FONSI became official Jan. 22 and was presented to the commissioners at their Feb. 2 meeting.

No significant environmental impacts were found in the environmental assessment, which was made available for public viewing on the county's Web site and various locations throughout the county from September through November.

During that time, only two verbal comments were received at the public hearing and two written comments received during the comment period, all of which were in favor of the project itself.

The statement now opens the door to allow acquisition of land, construction of a runway, parking apron and taxiways as well as construction of an airport access road and perimeter wildlife fencing. There also will be installation of visual and navigational aids.

With the FONSI complete, commissioners agreed to begin advertising for engineering services. The county would be entering into a five-year agreement with an engineering firm to complete the project.

In other business, the commissioners approved three tax rebates to Direct TV after the

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100 days of school celebration



Thermopolis kindergartner Kaidy Randall wears special, homemade glasses as she snaps her fingers while dancing to a song last Thursday at Ralph Witters Elementary

School. The pupils made the "100" glasses to celebrate 100 days of school. In the background is William Jamieson. — Keith E. Domke photo

Landfill talk centers on contaminants

◆ The state has determined that the town can continue current operations on the north half of the existing landfill that would provide eight to 10 years of use at the current rate.

by Tom Burkindine

Thermopolis is still in discussions with the Department of Environmental Quality concerning the town's landfill and whether or not contaminants are leaching into groundwater.

During last week's meeting of the Thermopolis Town Council, town engineer Heath Overfield and assistant to the mayor Dan Stansill told council members that the ongoing fight with the DEQ over the landfill

has come to another crossroads. The town must submit a response by Feb. 20 regarding plans to continue testing groundwater samples at the landfill.

Thermopolis Public Works superintendent Ernie Slagle said the next round of testing is scheduled for the end of February.

Overfield said two of the three monitoring wells at the landfill were built last summer, yet the state wants additional wells drilled. He recommended drafting a letter to the DEQ indicating the city's compliance with continued testing while also urging the state to fund any additional wells.

The department has told the town that "much, if not all, of this work will be eligible for reimbursement" as long as money in the state's well program is available. Council

member Richard Hall asked that a letter sent to the DEQ include reference to the town's need for funding to complete additional projects.

The state has determined that the town can continue current operations on the north half of the existing landfill that would provide eight to 10 years of use at the current rate.

DEQ representatives have said Thermopolis should develop a proposal for drilling and installation of "several additional wells." Overfield said the drilling can go as deep as 50 to 60 feet to reach groundwater. The testing should show if the groundwater under the landfill is a confined reservoir or

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'Suspicious' phone call puts local schools on lockdown

by Keith E. Domke

All three Hot Springs County schools in Thermopolis went into a lockdown mode Friday afternoon after a "suspicious call" came into dispatch between 1:45 and 1:50 p.m. The lockdown process went smoothly and everything was found to be in order, local authorities said.

"A suspicious call came in," Hot Springs County Sheriff Lou Falgoust said after the lockdown on Friday. "It was a quick hang up call."

Officers from both the sheriff's office and the Thermopolis Police Department quickly were dispatched to the high school, middle school and Ralph Witters Elementary School, and then the schools were called as the lockdown process started. Students were locked in their classrooms and were told to stay away from doors and windows. The buildings were searched, and nothing out of the ordinary was found.

"Student safety is always our primary concern," superintendent Marty Kobza said. "We take all incidents seriously."

Falgoust agreed.



With a Thermopolis Police Department car parked in front, Hot Springs County School District superintendent Marty Kobza walks out of Ralph Witters Elementary School after the

three schools in town were put on lockdown last Friday afternoon. A suspicious call to dispatch caused the concern. —Lara Love photo

The nature of the call officially was not released.

"We're going to listen to it and do all we can to track down who

did it," the sheriff said.

The lockdown was lifted shortly after 3 p.m.

As a precautionary measure,

officers again were dispatched to the three schools at the end of the day to make sure the dismissal process went smoothly.

Again, nothing out of the ordinary happened.

"We're always going to err on the side of safety," Falgoust said.

The sheriff said he did not know if there was any correlation between the call and the school shooting that took place on Friday in Alabama. There, in Madison, officers responded to the scene at about the same time as the call came into Thermopolis.

According to CNN, the shooting occurred during a class change at Discovery Middle School in Madison before 2 p.m. A call came in at 1:46 p.m. and police were on the scene at 1:48.

Authorities confirmed that 14-year-old Todd T. Brown was shot in the back of the head and was transported to Huntsville Hospital. He later died there. Sources said the victim was a ninth-grader at the school.

The shooter, also a ninth-grader at the school, is in custody. His name has not been released. Schools were in session as usual there on Monday.

There was no known motive for the Alabama shooting.