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# Independent Record

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WHN housing plan raises ire

## Officials, rental owners clash

by Tom Burkindine

An informational meeting was held by officials from the Wyoming Housing Network to explain the need for a subsidized housing project in Thermopolis. Owners of local rental properties were in attendance and argued that the project was unnecessary and would undercut their business.

WHN President and CEO Greg Hancock gave a presentation showing the results from a previous study conducted in 2008 that found a gap between housing needs and existing rental properties. According to the findings, only two properties offer subsidized rental rates and both target seniors and people with disabilities.

A 2009 survey found citizens see affordable housing as a key need in the community. At that time, there was only a 1.6 percent vacancy rate and Hancock said a five percent rate is considered healthy.

The studies were conducted after the Thermopolis Housing Committee was formed in 2007. The committee has worked in collaboration with WHN and the USDA Rural Development to develop the project and received a letter of support from the Thermopolis Town Council last summer.

Since that time, owners of local rental properties have stymied the proposal indicating they feel it abandons the conservative principles traditionally held in Wyoming and questioning the ability of traditional business owners to compete with properties receiving government funding.

Joe Casciato took issue with the underlying theories behind such housing.

"Allowing people to live beyond what they can afford is offensive to me," Casciato said. "You're taking our money through taxation and letting people live beyond their means through subsidy."

After rental owner Bengé

Brown said Hancock and other conservatives should not lose sight of the principles held by the citizens of Wyoming. Hancock said he understood the values of the community but felt business owners should understand the current housing market.

"There's a strong element of truth to that but it has to be tempered by reality," Hancock said. "[The federal government] is in the middle of the housing business, like it or not."

The proposal includes between eight and 16 units including one, two and three-bedroom apartments in a development to be called Deer Park. Hancock said professional and experienced property management would be necessary to ensure the quality and preservation of the units.

"We're responding to a community need established over the past several years and making sure we do something about it," Hancock said. "The condition of the housing units available in Thermopolis does not balance with the need. Better buildings nurture better lives."

According to Hancock, young professionals, seniors and families earning between \$17,200 and \$28,600 per year would be targeted as possible tenants for the housing. WHN considers 30 percent of that income to be an appropriate amount to be used for housing costs and any amount necessary above that amount would likely be subsidized.

The owners of rental properties feel there is not a need present for the additional housing and said it is unfair to force them to lower rental rates and compete with a property that has government funding available.

"When you use federal funds your changing the free market dynamic and forcing us to compete on an uneven playing field," Casciato said. "You're using my tax dollars to compete with me and other property owners."

Allowing people to live beyond what they can afford is offensive to me.

**JOE CASCIATO**  
Local businessman

## Wind River Canyon settlers



Fred Yeaman points out the architecture of the original J. Bob White family home in the canyon during the Mystic Wind River Canyon tour Saturday. The stones for the structures were gathered by the White children. Wood for the building was whatever could be caught floating down the river. Above, the goat barn has a ramp where the animals stood while being milked. The goats were brought down by the White siblings from the bluffs above the property. Yeaman's wife, Betty is one of ten White siblings.

-- Peggy Shaffer photos



## Contractor says town needs inspector

by Tom Burkindine

A local contractor spoke to the town representatives and asked that council members consider hiring a full-time inspector during last week's meeting of the Thermopolis Town Council.

Steve Jellis, contractor and owner of a local plumbing and heating company, told council members he had encountered trouble waiting for inspections. Engineering Associates is contracted by the town to complete inspections of building projects. Jellis said he and other contractors faced delays in schedules because they were forced to wait.

According to Jellis, contrac-

tors have been instructed to give a full day's notice before all inspections. He said that is an unrealistic policy.

"There's no way we can schedule inspections 24 hours out," Jellis said. "That's virtually impossible with the service we provide."

Mayor Bill Malloy said he understood the frustration and the matter would be addressed by the council but had serious doubts about available funding. The town is in the early stages of creating a budget for the upcoming fiscal year but cuts in the budget are expected because of the economic downturn throughout the past year.

"I'm not sure we can afford an

inspector eight hours a day, five days a week," Malloy said.

The International Code Council, a non-profit organization that issues inspector certification in every state, must certify inspectors.

The council passed the first reading of an ordinance to re-

zone an area on the west side of 14th Street as a medium density site. The rezone is part of a controversial plan to build a subsidized housing project on the land. Council members Toni Casciato and Thomas Linnan abstained from the vote.

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## Commissioners appoint Shaffer as supervisor

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners approved a land use change, appointed a new Road and Bridge Department supervisor and discussed development of geothermal "green" energy on Bureau of Land Management lands at their March 18 meeting.

Sitting for the first time in the new commissioner's meeting room in the recently completed Government Annex, the commissioners appointed Ray Shaffer as the new supervisor for the Road and Bridge Department.

"We had three applications for the position," commission chairman John Lumley said. "We conducted two interviews and the third applicant withdrew."

Shaffer has been interim supervisor since the retirement of Jim Skelton late last year.

The commissioners held a public meeting regarding a land use change application for property owned by Pat McClintock on Lane 1.

Bob Wyss, real estate agent for the family, informed the board he found that some of the land in the area was already deemed commercial. The McClintock's are requesting their land use classification be changed to commercial.

Wyss went on to say there should be no parking problem as the area meets the county standards for parking. In addition, there would be no parking on Lane 1 itself.

"There is lots of parking available on the acreage," Wyss said.

"Our access on Lane 1 is not wide enough," area resident Dolly Daniels said. "The road is more like 40 feet, not 60. You can't pass two vehicles on it."

According to measurements taken by Daniels' husband Jim, the entrance to the lane is only 26 feet.

"I don't wish any hardship on Mrs. McClintock," Mr. Daniels said. "But the three of us (surrounding landowners) shouldn't have a hardship either."

"They would be encroaching on cemetery property if they used the area they propose."

Lane 1 is actually owned by the cemetery district and the McClintocks have already secured an easement from the cemetery board.

"It is a private road," Wyss said. "The lane can be any size from two tracks to 60 feet."

County Attorney Jerry Williams reviewed the easement granted by the cemetery district and told the commissioners the language within the easement agreement prevents any parking on the lane.

The commissioners voted unanimously to approve the land use change from residential to commercial.

The commissioners also met with Carla Bird with the Bureau of Land Management to discuss geothermal development

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## Blood draws nearing end

by Cindy Glasson

These are the final days to have blood drawn for the upcoming Kiwanis Health Fair on April 10.

A variety of blood tests are available with the blood draw at Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital through Saturday, March 27. Draws are done from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. with registration in the hospital lobby.

Appointments are not needed for the blood draw.

Some of the tests will require 12 hours of fasting. Diabetics however need to drink plenty of water and take their necessary medications.

The annual health fair will be held at the middle school on Saturday, April 10 from 8 a.m. until noon.

Local physicians as well as some specialists will be available to go through your blood screening with you at the fair along with lots of health related booths.



Former emergency room nurse Sally Becker has her blood drawn for the Kiwanis Health Fair by nurse Connie Hart. The blood draw has been averaging 40 people per hour.