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Utility rate increase to take effect in May

by J.D. Stetson

The Thermopolis Town Council unanimously voted on final reading to increase utility rates for their water, sewer and sanitation utilities.

The council passed the three ordinances and set the effective date for the increases for May 1. The effective date is contingent upon having a smooth transition in the town billing system.

Once the new rates are tabulated, a home using an average of 1,000 gallons of water a month would see an increase in their utility bill of about \$13.

The water ordinance creates a base charge of varying rates, depending on the size of tap for each home or business. The sewer ordinance creates a usage charge, depending on how much water is sent through the system. The sanitation increase raises the flat rate from \$14.30 a month to \$18.30 a month for residences and raises the container usage rates for businesses.

Other service fees

The town council also considered raising fees for a few other services to bring them into line with the utility fees.

The council discussed the town's bulk water rates and charges for the coin-operated "water salesman" at the water treatment plant and discussed charging higher rates to bring them in line with the town's new out-of-town water rates.

For the coin-operated machine, the town would bring the amount of water down from 85 gallons for 25 cents to 65 gallons for 25 cents, which is equivalent to 1,000 gallons for \$3.78, said mayor's assistant Fred Crosby.

The town also would create

a 50-cent minimum charge per use of the machine in order to offset maintenance costs caused by wear and tear of the machine over time.

The council also discussed raising the fees for dumping at the landfill from \$5.50 per cubic yard to about \$7 per cubic yard in order to be in line with the new in-town sanitation rate.

Crosby added the town feels that if it is raising rates for in-town residents, it should be across the board with all of their fees in order to help cover the cost of upcoming improvements to each utility.

Food vendors

The council also discussed pursuing a solution to a problem caused by mobile food vendors who spend months in town at various locations.

One of the items discussed was whether to license the vendors up front in order for them to pay their cost of sanitation.

Crosby said the town has had issues with some of the vendors in the past who set up in a location and use town dumpsters, but the town has no way to make them pay for use of the dumpster without a permanent location.

By licensing the vendors, the town would be able to get an address and contact information for a person in charge of the business while also getting sanitation money up front.

The town already licenses transient merchants who sell merchandise in parking lots or other private property, but do not license food vendors, Crosby said.

Mayor Bill Malloy directed Crosby to look into the issue further and come back with a recommendation for the council.

Gerber benefit raises \$11,000



John Holm calls while Steve Hamann displays a picnic basket to attendees of a benefit dinner and auction for Mikey Gerber on Saturday at the Thermopolis VFW. The event served 170 meals and raised \$11,023 to help offset

the cost of medical care for the Gerber family. One of the benefit organizers, Karlene Huckman, called it an "absolutely fantastic" community effort.

— J.D. Stetson photo

Snag found in airport equipment bid

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners are dealing with an unusual twist in the acquisition of snow removal equipment for the airport.

The equipment went out for bid several months ago with Lariat International from Casper presenting the lowest bid, \$126,860, for the plow and necessary attachments.

The bid was awarded to Lariat on March 15.

On April 1, Lariat informed GDA Engineering, the firm that compiled the bids for the commissioners, they had made an "error" in their bid and would like to amend the bid to account for the mistake.

Lariat would like to add an additional \$14,000 to the original bid to make up for a factory discount that amounted to just 17.5 percent rather than the 35-percent discount they had assumed.

The final amended bid from Lariat totals \$140,674, just less than \$4,000 lower than the next lowest bidder, Peterbuilt. Peterbuilt's bid is still viable for another 30 days.

The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) Aeronautical Division had approved the original bid, and it is their conclusion that what Lariat is trying to do, by amending their bid, is unethical.

County attorney Jerry Williams told the commissioners allowing them to change their bid at this juncture is "absolutely inappropriate."

"They understand the bid process," Williams said. "Nothing shows they didn't understand the nature of the bid or what was needed. You're (the commissioners) not obligated to honor the bid.

"With funding from another entity (WYDOT), I don't suggest doing anything that would make them pay more than the bid," he said. "Ask them to honor it first. WYDOT suggests letting them honor it. If not, they forfeit the bid bond."

The bid bond for the equipment amounts to approximately \$6,000.

"I suggest we sign everything, putting

the ball in Lariat's court," commissioner Brad Basse said. "They either honor it or they don't."

The commissioners voted unanimously to sign the documents for the bid at the original price and will send a letter to Lariat asking whether they will honor the contract or not.

The letter will also advise them if they do not honor the original bid they will be forfeiting the bid bond and could face other recourse including, but not limited to, paying for additional advertising should the commissioners decide to re-bid the equipment as well as paying the difference between their original bid and the bid of the next lowest bidder.

A copy of the letter will be sent to WYDOT as well. Lariat will be given 10 days to reply.

Fueling station upgrade

Ray Shaffer, superintendent of the Hot Springs County Road and Bridge Department, told the commissioners during their meeting Tuesday he had met with Marty Kobza, superintendent for the school district, regarding an upgrade of the fueling station used by the school and other county entities.

The fueling station is located at the school bus barn on Springview Street, just across the road from Weed and Pest and Road and Bridge.

Shaffer said the system has been in place for about 20 years and is in need of upgrading to meet compliance regulations.

"We all agreed to keep the system in place," Shaffer said. "Its very handy, but it needs upgrades.

"The school said they are willing to help share the costs and they realize compliance is going to be an ongoing issue."

The price for the needed upgrades will be in the neighborhood of \$30,000 to \$35,000.

The commissioners suggested checking with the cemetery district and Weed and Pest to see if they would be interested in using the fueling station as well. The sher-

iff's office and Town of Thermopolis could also use the station.

"The more entities we can get into the pool the better it will be for everybody, including the taxpayers," chairman John Lumley said.

Gift to museum

Ross Rhodes, director of the Hot Springs County Museum and Cultural Center, informed the commissioners the museum has received notice it has been awarded money from the Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund.

The Gift Fund is an independent public charity with donor-advised funding.

In order to receive the gift, monies must be sent through a "pass through" organization, either the commissioners or a qualified 501(c)(3) entity.

County clerk Hans Odde discussed the gift with county auditor Michael Wright, who indicated he saw no problem with the money passing through the commissioners.

It would require additional paperwork and a line item adjustment during the budget session, but otherwise, Wright felt it was fine.

The Gift Fund did not tell Rhodes how much the gift would be, nor did they tell him who the donor was, saying that information would be revealed when the funds were sent. They did, however, tell him it was a private donation and the donor wanted to see the funds go to the museum.

After some discussion and research into the Gift Fund, the commissioners agreed Rhodes could accept the gift on behalf of the museum, but suggested it be passed through the Pioneer Association rather than the county.

In other business, the commissioners approved a liquor permit for Wolf Creek Store (Roland Luehne), approved two water well permit applications and set a public meeting date regarding land trust issues.

The land trust meeting will be held Tuesday, April 19 from 7 to 9 p.m. in the middle school commons.

Cheyenne cops nab absconded sex offender

The Hot Springs County Sheriff's Office reported Cheyenne law enforcement arrested absconded sex offender Alan Lee Bazzle on the morning of Thursday, March 31.

Bazzle had failed to register his status with the department when he left Hot Springs County

and deputies had reported his status as absconded in a prior report.

Shortly after the report, deputies received two phone calls from the public leading them to believe Bazzle had moved to Cheyenne. Deputies also contacted former acquaintances of Bazzle, leading them to the cap-

ital city.

Deputies informed law enforcement in Laramie County and they were quick to arrest Bazzle on the Hot Springs County warrant, said Kim Black, department spokeswoman.

Bazzle was expected to be extradited to Hot Springs Coun-

ty within the week. Bazzle was convicted on March 1, 2010, in Thermopolis of sexual abuse of a minor in the third degree.

Failure to register as a sex offender and keeping registration up to date is considered a felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison, a \$10,000 fine or both.

Mark Mortimore new coroner

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners appointed Mark Mortimore as county coroner at their meeting Tuesday. He replaces his brother, Mike Mortimore, who recently resigned.

The commissioners held interviews Monday evening with both Mortimores, along with Dr. Howard Willson.

The commissioners agreed

it was a difficult choice to make as all three candidates brought different expertise to the table.

"I am honored," Mark Mortimore said, "and I look forward to serving the people of Hot Springs County."

"I want to commend the commissioners on everything they did during the process," Willson said after Mortimore was appointed.

Up and over



Third grader McKenzie Kannapel flies over the hurdles while maneuvering the obstacle course at Ralph Witters Elementary. —Cindy Glasson photo