

Council approves motion for judgement against county

by Mark Dykes

Following an executive session Tuesday evening, the Thermopolis Town Council, with Councilman John Dorman Sr. absent and Councilman Dusty Lewis voting “no,” approved a motion to authorize the filing of a declaratory judgment against the County, for clarification of the County’s duty under Title 25 to pay for detention, treatment and transportation of persons in need of mental hospitalization.

The judgment will hopefully provide better definition of the state statute.

Also during the meeting, Council briefly discussed upcoming budget meetings. Mayor

Mike Mortimore plans to go over the budget a line item at a time during the first meeting in May, but added there’s not a lot of blue sky with it. He indicated the Council, during the budget discussions, would get a good idea of how much the town relies on its savings.

Council approved the purchase of a copier from The Office Shop, Inc.

Mayor’s Assistant Fred Crosby explained the current office copier continues to break down more and more. Though the initial price of the new copier comes in at \$27,458, The Office Shop offered a \$16,010 trade in of the old copier, as well as knocking off the \$840 fax board, which brings the final dollar amount

to \$10,608 for the new copier.

According to a letter accompanying the offer, The Office Shop only ordered seven of the machines in a closeout special; the business was able to hold one for Thermopolis. The letter further states the new copier will drop the service contract down to .64 cents per copy from 1.6 cents, saving nearly a penny per copy. The new machine has the capability to scan, email copies directly, print and fax, and also comes with a stapler and hole punch.

Mortimore noted the service agreement also provides for toner, which can often be one of

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photo by Dennis Nierzwicki

Racing for a reason

Abigail Flowers and Oliver Bihr take laps on trikes inside the fair building Saturday for the Children’s Resource Center St. Jude Trike-A-Thon fundraiser.

Lodging tax will be on general election ballot

by April S. Kelley

The County Commissioners approved the Travel and Tourism Board’s request for permission to include a 4-cent lodging tax on the November general election ballot.

Tourism Director Amanda Moeller presented the board with information about the tax, explaining a rise in tourists in the Hot Springs County area due to expanded advertising.

“There are more people coming and staying in lodging establishments in Hot Springs County,” Moeller said. “I would also note that we have six, soon to be eight, vacation rentals on our website. Those also collect a lodging tax. We’ve been able to educate those folks on how to collect it and that’s just more money going into that lodging tax.”

Moeller explained the total cost of taxes at lodging establishments is 9 percent, but only 4 percent of that is the lodging tax. The other five percent is sales tax. She emphasized the importance of residents understanding that this is not a tax they will have to pay.

“It is not our county that pays that lodging tax,” she said. “We are trying to explain to people that it’s not their tax to pay. Our visitors and tourists are the only ones that pay that tax.”

Moeller also said they are seeing a lot of increase in their lodging tax deposits, due to increased tourism.

“We are seeing more folks in Thermopolis,” she said. “We know that our focused advertising is working.”

The “opolis” branding will continue to be used. The Travel and Tourism Board is using that advertising across the board and it has proven to be an effective brand, she said.

Commissioner Brad Basse asked Moeller if the ballot tax will be the total 4-cents, because it had been worded differently in the past.

“The ballot will read, ‘Shall Hot Springs County renew for an additional four years in lodging tax of four percent upon accommodation or space for transient visitors or tourists?’” Moeller said. “Then residents can mark whether they are for or against the tax.”

Basse made a motion to approve the 4-cent lodging tax to be placed on the November general election ballot.

“Good job,” Basse said. “That is one portion of our economy that is thriving as opposed to some other areas.”

Vice-Chairman Tom Ryan, acting as Temporary Chairman at this meeting in lieu of Chairman John Lumley’s absence, approved the motion.

Hot Springs State Park master plan released, online comment period open

by April S. Kelley

The Hot Springs State Park draft master plan was released Monday. The purpose of the 20-year master plan is to guide the long-term physical improvement, management and use of the entire 1,100-acre park. The plan includes publicly and privately owned buildings, lands west of Highway 20, the bison pasture and the recreational and thermal features. It provides a comprehensive planning and decision-making structure to accommodate recreational and developmental amenities, infrastructure and access in balance with the preservation of cultural and natural resources.

The goals of the plan are to develop, historic preservation, reconstruction and demolition at HSSP—including the interior, exterior and surrounding landscape; to improve the park circulation system; to protect and maintain the natural, cultural and social resources; to manage, staff, program and fund HSSP; to interpret and educate opportunities; to maintain and develop partnerships; to promote and advertise; to address economic and community impact; to provide tourist accommodations; and to appropriate transfer, sale, lease and purchase of land.

The draft plan includes changes to the buildings, facilities and grounds of park. The plan for the state bathhouse would add one natural soaking pool, where there currently is not one.

Aquatic facilities and health and wellness changes in the draft plan include having only one outdoor pool and only one indoor pool, which means one of the already existing outdoor pools and one of the already existing indoor pools would be eliminated.

Lodging in HSSP would expand from the current 116 hotel rooms/cabins to 150 rooms in total. Two acres would be added to the park for camping, whereas there are currently zero acres designated for camping. Seasonal employee camping areas would also be expanded from 7,500 square feet to 15,000 square feet. There would also be one restroom/shower area added for seasonal employees. There is currently no restroom/shower area for seasonal employees.

The draft plan also calls for some grounds areas to be ex-

panded. The Washakie (Kiwanis) Picnic Shelter would be expanded from 650 square feet to 1,200 square feet. There may also be an addition of a Historic Garden area, but it is still to be determined. A botanic/natural garden area would be added and will cover 15,000 square feet.

The draft plan also calls for expansion of the visitor center from 640 square feet to 5,000 square feet designated for a State Park Visitor Center with a meeting space, offices and public restrooms as well as 2,500 square feet for the Chamber of Commerce.

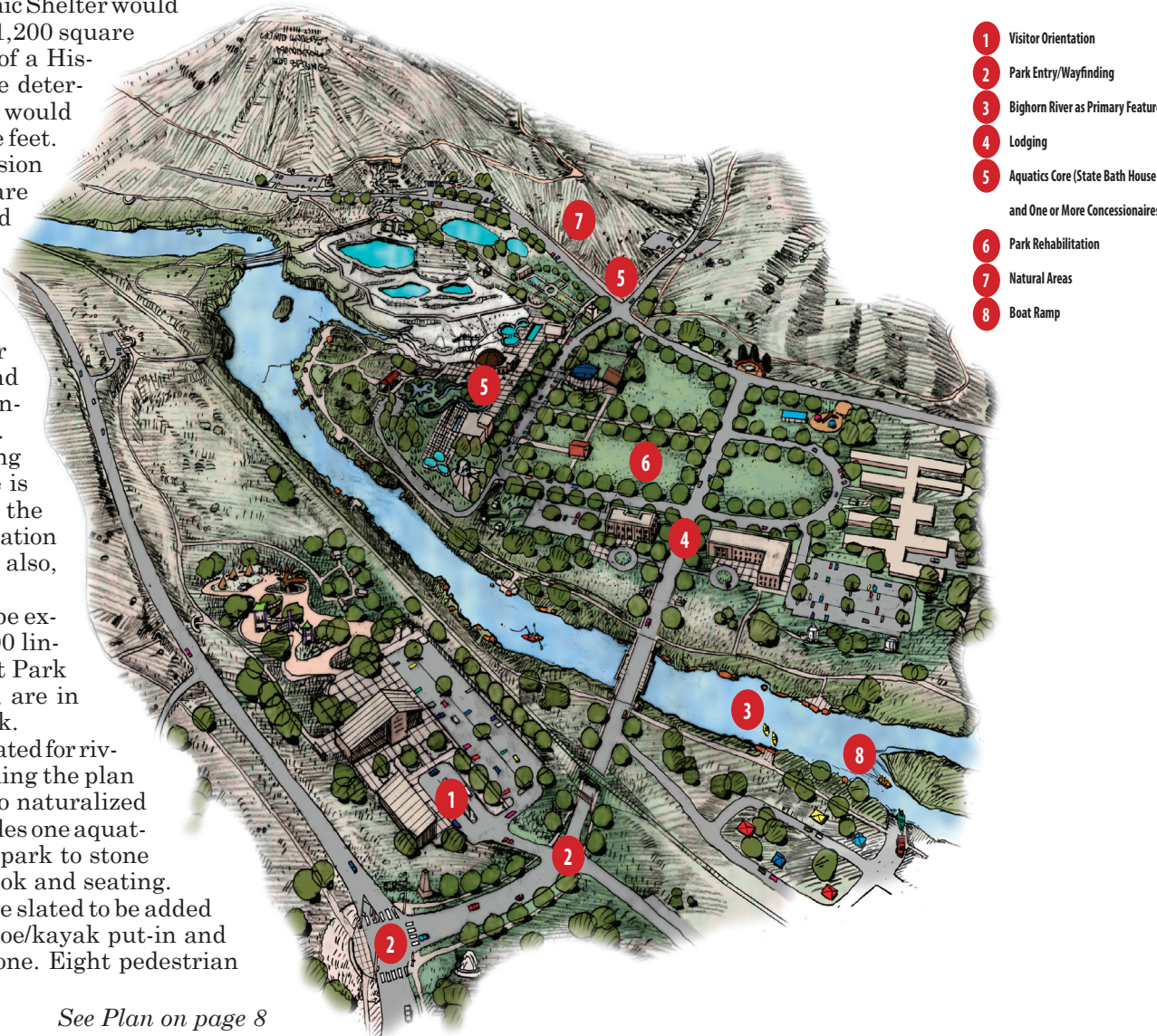
The addition of a discovery center could be up to 20,000 square feet, and the addition of a children’s nature center could be up to 50,000 square feet.

The draft plan also discusses adding more signs to the park. Where there is now one sign for the park gateways, the plan calls for five. Thirteen park orientation kiosks and trailheads will be added also, where there are currently zero.

The Riverwalk Trail is planned to be expanded from 2,200 linear feet to 4,500 linear feet. Two bridge overlooks, one at Park Street and one on Broadway Street, are in the draft plan to be added to the park.

Nine acres of land have been designated for river edge naturalized vegetation, meaning the plan wishes to convert from mown lawn to naturalized river vegetation. The draft plan includes one aquatic facility outflow to be added to the park to stone channel edge trail, pedestrian overlook and seating.

More recreational opportunities are slated to be added to the park also, including three canoe/kayak put-in and take-out areas, where there is now one. Eight pedestrian



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