



# Town council approves overage split

by Mark Dykes  
Tuesday evening, Thermopolis Town Council approved a motion to split overages, with the one percent sales tax budget, with Hot Springs County in regard to a recent update to the Law Enforcement Center communications area.  
The project was initially bid at \$3,324. Police Chief Steve Shay explained a big part of the update involved some electrical work. Part of that was moving an analog box that operated doors within the center.  
The work was done in a professional manner, Shay said, but Brad Basse noted the project had gone over the initial bid. The final cost came in at \$11,776.60, though a “break even”

amount excluding overhead and other costs would be \$8,921.67.  
Council approved to pay half of the overages incurred by the final cost, or \$4,226.30, with the county paying the other half. There was some discussion as to whether SLIB grant fund money would be available to cover some of the payment, as it was originally allocated for the dispatch center but was later diverted to a project at the airport.  
During the meeting, Basse apologized for the overage, stressing it is not the way he does business and it was an unfortunate incident. Basse explained he looked at the project and made some assumptions about the work pre-

viously done at the dispatch center. Though the assumptions turned out to be false, he said they were so far into the project he committed to finishing it.  
Basse further explained, with a series of pictures provided to council, the various issues he ran into with the project, including exposed wiring, older user interfaces and wiring that followed no set color scheme among the various doors.  
Also during the meeting, council conducted a public hearing, during which there was no comment, with regard to several liquor

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photo by Cindy Glasson

## Devastated

Emma Lea looks over the fire damage that ruined her childhood home and destroyed a lifetime of memories in the early hours of Tuesday morning. The home belongs to her mother, Pam Stevens, who not only lived there for the past 30 years, but ran a day care out of the home. Firefighters were on the scene around 2:30 a.m. and spent four hours attempting to save the home while winds whipped the flames and smoke filled several blocks. A fund has been set up by the Day care Association to help Stevens with expenses. Donations may be made in her name at Central Bank and Trust.

# Winters discusses concealed carry in schools

by Cindy Glasson  
State Representative Nathan Winters began his first day back after the President’s Day Holiday in the judiciary committee.  
While in committee, they passed a bill, 8-1, that covers sexual assault from a position of power, creating stiff penalties for offenders.  
Winters said they heard heart-wrenching testimony from women who have suffered this type of assault, generally from a coach or a teacher when they were younger.  
“This happens more than we think,” Winters said.  
A similar bill was proposed last session but failed.

This time, they’ve taken more care in the wording of the bill and Winters hopes, this time, it passes.  
HB194, the school safety and security act, is set to be on the docket soon.  
The bill would allow teachers and other staff to carry a concealed firearm on school grounds.  
It does require training for those who carry and security measures that would prevent students from getting at any gun in the classroom.  
Winters said the impetus behind the bill is those really rural schools like Meeteetsee who are about 45 minutes away from any help from law enforcement.

“We had rural schools ask us to find a solution,” Winters said. “When they have help so far away, this makes sense.”  
Winters added that teachers know the student’s faces, they know the school and its hallways, so it makes sense they would be the first line of defense for student security in such remote areas.  
What to do about the condition of Interstate 80 is also being considered through SF140. The bill has passed the Senate and moved to the House.

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# Branin land use change request tabled

by Cindy Glasson  
Hot Springs County’s Land Use Planning Commission met last week to consider a land use change from residential to commercial on a plot of land near Kirby Creek.  
The land in question is owned by Leslie Branin on the northeast side of East River Road. Branin built a duplex on the property that is advertised as “cabins” for short-term rental, otherwise known as the Kirby Creek Cabins.  
Branin had the cabins built, held a grand opening and has rented them out occasionally before asking for the land use change.  
In addition to the cabins, Branin has two RV spaces available for rent and has plans for a grassy area on the land, which amounts to approximately an acre and a half of buildable ground, for tent camping as well as a second duplex.

There is an additional portion of the lot that is just over a half-acre in size where Branin plans to build her personal residence.  
Although the entire lot is about six acres, a majority of it falls on the flood plain for Kirby Creek, eliminating its use for building.  
Branin suggested to County Planner Bo Bowman that the area, when completed, would be run like a bed and breakfast type facility, however, bed and breakfasts are generally within residential areas and are a home with rooms to rent within the residence.  
The problem is, the cabins fall under one set of permitting requirements while the RV spaces and tent camping area fall under a completely different set of requirements.  
The planning commission is not happy that Branin went ahead with her plans and has begun renting out the cabins without first getting the proper permitting

and land use change.  
Planning commission member Roger Shaynor likened the situation to going fishing, and just as you’re loading your catch into your cooler the game warden shows up and you tell him, “Oh, I’m going to go get my license now.”  
Dee Hillberry, the man who sold Branin the property, is not happy either as he was told it was going to be a private residence.  
“I’m not very happy with this being a pocket of commercial in the middle of residential and agricultural land,” Hillberry said. “I don’t think it’s advisable to have the pockets of commercial in the midst of things.”  
The planning commission took no action on the land use change request, but instead, sent it back to Branin for further clarification on her entire plan. Once that is in place they can then make a determination if the land use change should be granted or not.

## Airport re-use meeting Monday

The first of two public meetings regarding the Hot Springs County-Thermopolis Municipal Airport re-use study has been scheduled for Monday, Feb. 27 at the Hot Springs County Annex starting at 7 p.m.  
Many community members have been tossing around different ideas as to what could be built on the site or what it could be used for to best benefit Thermopolis and Hot Springs County.  
The old airport has officially been closed to any air traffic in or out.  
The public is encouraged to attend the meeting and give their input on possible future uses for the land.