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Commission makes decision on funds, energy financing

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners discussed what to do with nearly \$300,000 in excess school bond funds during their Nov. 20 meeting, chose a bank for funding the energy saving proposal from Trane and heard an update on the new county airport.

School bond funds

Hot Springs County Treasurer Mickey Jean Ford informed the commissioners there are excess school bond funds being held on the books in the amount of \$289,094, and asked what the commissioners would like to do with the extra funds.

Technically, the funds should go back into the general fund, according to research Ford has done on the situation. She has been holding the funds on the books for more than a year to ensure all the proper steps are taken before disbursing them somewhere.

County Clerk Hans Odde said they wanted the public to know about the funds in order to keep things transparent.

The commissioners are concerned about the legislature's meeting in January, afraid the funds could be taken away, so acting quickly on what to do with the money is important.

According to County Attorney Jerry Williams, the situation isn't necessarily black and white as to what should be done with the money, but suggested the commissioners act quickly to transfer the funds.

Ford will draft a resolution to transfer the funds to the general account for the commissioners' next meeting.

Energy financing

Commission Chairman Brad Basse recused himself from voting on the energy financing issue, citing a conflict of interest both professionally as an electrical contractor and as a member of the board of one of the financial institutions being considered to finance the project.

Four local banks and two non-local banks provided financing proposals for a five-year period to pay for the energy update project proposed by Trane.

The two non-local banks included pre-pay penalties which the commissioners did not like, eliminating them from consideration.

Big Horn Federal proposed 3.08 percent financing for the five-year period, Pinnacle Bank proposed 2.95 percent with associated fees, Central Bank and

Trust offered 3.12 percent and Bank of Thermopolis proposed 3.58 percent for five years.

The commissioners discussed the options, stating that there could be a chance of paying off the note early if certain funds were to come through in a reasonable time.

All agreed the rates and fees were very competitive and very close together when all things were considered. At vote, the commissioners agreed to use Big Horn Federal for the project financing.

Airport update

The commissioners heard an update on the new county airport from Dusty Spomer with GDA Engineers.

Spomer said ground water for construction purposes has now been guaranteed through using the river at the Eighth Street bridge. Around 200,000 gallons of water per day is needed for the construction area, including keeping dust down and other construction needs.

GDA considered drilling a well on the property west of town; however, geologist Gretchen Hurley said the amount of water that would come out of a well on the property would be minimal at best and probably not nearly enough to use for construction.

A well may be drilled at a later date for domestic use at the airport, and Hurley thought there would be sufficient water for that type of well.

Spomer said Phase I is currently ongoing. The fencing is ahead of schedule and should be completed within a couple of weeks. Wildlife fencing may be done next week as well.

Work is continuing on the roads in and out of the property, both for airport access and for use by the Holden Ranch. Finishing touches will not be completed until next spring, but Spomer indicated that would not interfere with Phase II work.

Opening of bids for Phase II will be done on Dec. 6. There has been a lot of interest in this phase of the project and Spomer has a long list of major contractors planning on bidding the project.

Phase III should go to bid within the next six to eight weeks with bid opening in mid-March. This phase will include runway lighting with an expected conclusion to the phase some time in 2014.

Once the runway lighting is in, planes could technically take off from and land at the new airport; however, paving will not be completed until early- to mid-summer of 2014.



Lilly Seaton puts the finishing touch on Thermopolis TOPS Club's "Buttons 'N' Bows" tree, which will be one of 14 decorated trees to be auctioned during the Central Bank & Trust-sponsored Christmas Tree Festival on Monday evening at the bank. — Joe Sovo photo

Christmas Tree Festival

The 12th Annual Christmas Tree Festival, hosted by Central Bank & Trust, is quickly approaching.

The festival will be held Monday with refreshments at 5:30 p.m. and the auction at 6:30 p.m.

The festival will be held in the Central Bank & Trust lobby, featuring wreaths decorated by individuals and organizations as well as fully decorated Christmas trees, all of which will be

auctioned during the evening.

According to John Gibbel of CB&T, there will be 14 decorated trees on display and auctioned Monday. In addition, 18 wreaths and five items in the "On Their Own" category will be sold by auction. See the advertisement on page 16 of this issue for a list of the trees, wreaths and other items to be auctioned.

Last year's festival raised more than \$15,000 for the Ther-

mopolis Community Fund.

Monies raised are given to community organizations for various projects. The organizations put in an application requesting funds and must show what their project is, how money from the project will be spent and how it will benefit the community.

If you have any questions, call 864-5561 and ask for Hannah or Janice.

Lodging Tax Board adds two new members

by Cindy Glasson

The Thermopolis-Hot Springs County Lodging Tax Board is once again at full capacity with the appointment of two new members—from the Town of Thermopolis and the Town of East Thermopolis.

The at-large member, appointed by the Town of Thermopolis, is Angie Guyon from the Wyoming Dinosaur Center. Guyon is a past member of the board and past president as well.

The East Thermopolis appointment went to Cindy Ellison, owner of Shorty's Saloon and Liquor Store. Along with her experience in the liquor industry, Ellison brings major sales experience and hotel management experience to the table via previous employment by Hilton Hotels.

New board treasurer Carl Leyba has gone

through the financials and the budget and reported to the board that the budget is pretty much on track.

In addition, the board voted Pinnacle Bank as their primary banking institution for another year.

While approving bills to be paid, Leyba pointed out there are several bills that are already budgeted for and should be paid when they come in rather than waiting for the next board meeting for approval.

Since they are already part of the budget the money is set aside and does not need additional approval.

A copy of the latest minutes needs to be taken to the bank to approve changes to the signature card for the board's checking account. It has

been some time since a cleanup has been done of the signature card and the board wants to make sure there are no unauthorized signatures still on the card.

Billboard issue resolved

After much discussion the past few months between the Chamber of Commerce and the Lodging Tax Board, a decision was finally made on the fate of the Hessenthaler billboard south of town.

The Lodging Tax Board will take care of maintenance and advertising on the billboard as well as reimburse the Chamber \$1,250 for the five-year lease of the property.

In discussing the other billboards the board uses for advertising across the state, chamber

president Meri Ann Rush found a list of those billboards, but would like confirmation on which ones are still active and asked the board to review the list. She will also call AdBay to make sure the board has the most recent list.

Rush also informed the board that a recent meeting of the Chamber of Commerce placed the annual 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament the weekend of May 4-5 and that businesses really want to keep it downtown.

There will be a slight change in how the tournament and the vendors will be set up this year, making everything more centrally located—creating better communication during the annual event.

The Lodging Tax Board has set aside \$4,000 for advertising of the tournament for this year.

Parade float honors



The Safari Club float titled "Safari Christmas" earned first place in the Thermopolis Lighted Christmas Parade held Saturday evening. Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital's float took second place and the Round Top Sam's float was third. The Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce sponsored the parade. — Joe Sovo photo

Town approves new franchise agreement with Bresnan Comm.

The Thermopolis Town Council approved a final draft of a cable franchise agreement with Bresnan Communications at its Nov. 20 meeting.

The town has been negotiating a new 10-year franchise agreement since Cablevision bought Bresnan in 2010. The town had been operating on an extension of a prior agreement with Bresnan during the interim.

Under the agreement, the town would receive 5 percent of the gross revenue Bresnan collects for television service in the franchise area. The agreement also includes a provision allowing the town to amend the agreement if the courts or governing bodies determine that municipalities can collect franchise fees for telephone and Internet service.

Much of the agreement falls

under federal and state laws for cable franchises. It also includes provisions allowing access for one public, educational or governmental access channel.

If the town, or another entity, operates a public access channel, the agreement allows Bresnan to collect up to \$4,500 from subscribers to go toward capital needs of operating the channel.

The agreement outlines the cable company's capacity to operate the cable system in Thermopolis and in the public rights-of-way. It includes provisions for renewal of the agreement, stipulations for enforcing or terminating the agreement, insurance requirements and other legal requirements.

The contract went into effect the date of the Nov. 20 council meeting.