



City seeks to force land sale

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The Colby City Council took the first step to force the sale of land near the city airport in court at its meeting Tuesday night after hearing that negotiations had not produced an agreement.

The council approved a resolution to start "eminent domain" proceedings to force two landowners to sell land needed to create a safety zone at around the runway. City Attorney John Gatz said that the resolution covers the initial steps, but an ordinance will be needed to authorize proceedings in court.

The city says the landowners have property near the airport that the city needs to extend and widen its runway and shift it to the north as part of the airport master plan,

approved in 2005. The airport board has been trying to make a deal with the property owners.

In June, the council hired an Omaha firm, Midwest Right of Way Services Inc., to make them a final offer. City Manager Tyson McGreer said then that the city needs to buy about 100 acres, and that the two landowners are the last out of 13.

After the meeting, McGreer said the identity of the two landowners should come out as the city goes forward with getting the land, but he and Gatz both declined to say who they are.

In other business, the council:
• Discussed selling the Embark building downtown. McGreer said the city got the go-ahead from the state to sell the building last week. He added that the state, the larg-

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Santa City ready to roll

Santa City will be open again this year in Colby, carrying on a Christmas tradition begun in 1979.

"The Scout Hut has once again been transformed into a spectacular winter wonderland," said Leilani Thomas, director of the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The "official headquarters" for Santa Claus in Fike Park will be open the day after Thanksgiving, Friday, Nov. 29, from 1 to 5 p.m. and then every weekend from 1 to 5 p.m. Starting Monday, Dec.

16, Santa City will be open week-nights from 6 to 8 p.m. and on Christmas Eve, Santa will be there from 1 to 3 p.m.

"It is such a magical place," said Thomas, "and remember, it's not just for children."

Each year, Santa City welcomes over 2,000 visitors of every age, she said. Admission is free, but donations are accepted to help pay for new scenes and decorations.

For information, call the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce office at 460-3401.

After-school program grows

The after-school program averages more than 120 students, Grade School Principal Lance Krannawitter told the Colby School Board on Monday, and that's more than were expected this year.

Curriculum Director Diana Wieland added that Colby, unlike other schools, lets kids come to the after-school program as needed instead of making them come every day or not at all. This sched-

uling flexibility seems to be what parents need, she said.

Krannawitter highlighted the volunteer efforts of Wes and Jessica Smith, a retired couple, who come every day, Monday through Thursday, to help with the program.

"They are wonderful with the kids," he said.

Wieland said the program had

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Colby School District audit comes up clean

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The annual audit of the Colby School District by Adams, Brown, Beran and Ball revealed no significant problems, accountants reported to the school board Monday night.

Kaylin Ritter, a certified public accountant with the firm, reported that there were no violations of the state's cash basis law, which requires public entities like the school district to have enough cash to pay their obligations.

Ritter said the firm found one negative balance, in the fund that pays for the after-school program, but that is not a violation of the cash-basis rule since the program is waiting for reimbursement from a grant.

The district's balances do not include debts like bonds, she said, except for the payments being made on those debts.

Ritter and Nikole Schroeder, another certified public accountant with the firm, gave the board some recommendations for improvements to the district's financial situation and record-keeping.

Ritter said the firm likes to see agencies with enough cash on hand to cover three to six months of expenses, noting the district has a little less than three months.

Schroeder recommended the district go through its personnel files to ensure each file has both a W-4 form, required by federal law, and a K-4, required by state law. She said district employees have already started reviewing files.

She also recommended the signature stamp used for the grade school's activity

fund checks be secured to avoid the possibility of it being used improperly.

"We commend the district because they've already taken care of most (of our recommendations)," said Ritter.

Ritter also told the board that the district's employees were helpful while the firm was conducting its audit.

The board later voted to accept the audit report.

In other business, the board:

• Approved requests from a handful of high school students asking for early graduation at midyear.

Principal Jeff Wallingford said he interviews each student about their reasons for early graduation and future plans. Many already have jobs or other plans, he said.

"They're not just going to sit at home and play video games," he said.

• Approved reimbursements of \$20 per employee for those who choose to participate in wellness activities planned for January at Citizens Medical Center.

• Discussed changing the pay rate for activity bus drivers. Currently, the district pays \$80 per trip for most trips, said Harrison. She suggested changing this rate to \$12 per hour.

Harrison said she compared pay rates for other districts, but they vary. Many districts do not provide health insurance for activity-bus drivers, but Colby does. Thus, the \$12 per hour rate would actually be more like \$14 or more, she said.

The board tabled a decision until its next meeting, when more information should be available.

• Appointed board member Omar Weber as the district's representative to

Northwest Kansas Technical College. Ed Geishler, the previous representative, has resigned his position on the board.

• Hired two new custodians, one new after-school aide, a new high school C-team men's basketball coach and a new high school junior varsity men's basketball coach.

Activities Director Larry Grabel said he has had trouble finding basketball coaches for the high school teams, adding that scheduling concerns and politics discourage many qualified coaches from helping out.

The next board meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Monday, Dec. 16, at the district administration building.



Tearing out gets ready to renovate

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press
Jose Martinez (top, left) and his brother, Julio Martinez, who work for B&R Insulation, were tearing out the second story ceiling of the old St. Thomas Hospital this morning. At left, Jose Martinez cut away the wire that once held up the ceiling. That's just a small part of the restoration of the building (below), due to be turned into apartments by next summer.