

County shifts some money to draw better interest

By Tom Betz
ntbetz@nwkans.com
 Cuts in interest rates by the Federal Reserve Board have Sherman County officials looking for ways to maximize the return on taxpayer money, and the county will be shifting some accounts to get a higher interest rate.

In January, Commissioner Kevin Rasure asked Sherman County Treasurer Iris Scheopner to look at the bank accounts and see if the county could get more interest income.

Scheopner reported at the Feb. 12 meeting she was going to shift some of the county money from First National Bank to People's State Bank in the first week of March.

Scheopner said People's would pay a higher rate based on the Treasury T-bill rates, and that First National could not match it.

At a special meeting Friday afternoon, Scheopner met with the commissioners and representatives of First National and People's to explain how the accounts would be split.

Scheopner said she had checked with all the banks here and that People's was

willing to pay a higher rate, 2.95 percent. She said People's also offered a higher overnight rate.

Commissioner Mitch Tiede asked Scheopner if she was thinking of moving all the accounts to People's, including the checking account.

Scheopner said she had agreed not to move the payroll and checking account that the county clerk's office uses to pay the monthly bills and payroll.

"We would have checking at both of the banks," Scheopner added.

County Clerk Janet Rumpel said she had asked Scheopner not to move the checking account because she had just ordered about \$700 worth of new checks.

Tiede asked if money could be transferred between the banks, and if there really was any need for another checking account.

John Pope, president of People's State, said it could be set up any way the county wants, with transfers to move money between the banks.

"You could write checks at either bank," Pope said, "and we will give you same-day availability of the money."

Larry McCants, president of First National, said he did not see a problem because the transactions could all be done electronically through Internet connections.

Pope said the Federal Reserve is working to do away with float from the time a person writes a check until it is deposited. He said with the increased use of electronic check recording, soon, if you write a check, it could beat you to the bank.

Rasure said he felt that with the amount of money the county had invested in the checks, it would be good to leave the checking account where it is and use both banks.

Scheopner said she was not moving the checking account and had talked to Rumpel about that on Friday morning.

Rasure asked who would sign the transfer checks between banks Scheopner said they would be two-signature checks requiring her signature and Rumpel's signature.

McCants suggested the treasurer use electronic transfers instead. Tiede said if that were done, he did not see a need for a second checking account.

Scheopner said she felt it would be easier from a checking account.

Commissioner Chuck Thomas asked about service charges. Scheopner said the county is not paying service charges from any bank.

Rasure asked which accounts would be moved and Scheopner handed each commissioner a list of those that would be moved and those that would stay at First National.

Accounts that will move to People's in March include:

- Sherman County savings, \$2,512,758 (as of Thursday, Feb. 14).
- 911 wireless account, \$20,202.
- 911 regular account, \$78,494.
- Microloan savings, \$5,865.
- Road project sales tax fund, \$162,184.
- Register of deeds technology fund, \$1,367.

Rasure asked if the big difference between the two banks was the interest rate.

Scheopner said that was correct, that People's would pay a higher rate based on the Federal Treasury T-bill. She said First National has agreed to pay a higher three-month rate, which is better than what the county has had, but First National could not

go to the rate that People's will pay.

Accounts remaining at First National include:

- Checking for accounts payable and payroll.
- General obligation road bond fund, where the money is moved from Transamerica to pay the bills for the city-county road projects.
- AFLAC Flex One account, an employee insurance program.
- A Community Development Block Grant account with \$100 left from one of the grants that has not been moved.
- Five certificates of deposit, three for \$250,000 each, one for \$300,000 and one for \$100,000.

The commissioners plan another special meeting, this one with the Goodland City commission and the Rural Fire District board, at 7 p.m. on Monday at the city commission room to talk about fire department issues.

The commissioners' next regular meeting will be at 8 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 29, in the commission room on the main floor of the Sherman County Courthouse, 813 Broadway.

Goodland woman testifies on tourism budget changes

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controlled instead by a board of 13.

If passed, the law would establish a travel and tourism development fund and specify that it can only be used for promoting travel and tourism, effective in October.

Money for the initiative would include \$4.1 million from the state budget, money from sales tax collected in "tourism companies," tax credits (opportunities allowing businesses to invest in the organization) and a percentage of state "gaming revenues," which includes money from state lotteries and may include in the future money raised from casinos.

Eleven members of travel organizations, owners of travel-related busi-

nesses and residents from across the state testified before the committee, Price said, and 19 others sent written testimony in favor of the bill.

They told the committee tourism promotion is an investment in Kansas which has excellent returns, she said, but marketing efforts must have a budget that allows Kansas to compete with neighboring states. The industry needs continuity in the travel director's office, which has changed hands 12 times in 25 years, supporters said.

The bill would pull tourism out of the Department of Commerce, Price said; travel and tourism has been its own division for over 20 years, but in reorganizing, the department put it under communication and

marketing services. Besides, she said, nearly every time the state gets a new governor, a new travel and tourism director is appointed. Sometimes it's a professional person in the industry but not always.

Travel and tourism needs to be accountable to the legislature, she said, and free of bureaucracy.

People think those promoting tourism are asking for more money, Pricesaid, but that is not true — they just want to keep the budget they are supposed to have. The tourism promotion effort is self-sufficient, she added.

The industry is not asking the legislature for \$15 million, Price said; it is asking for the nearly \$5 million the legislature already gives and asking for the increases to come

from taxes collected from tourism businesses and from gaming, areas which will benefit from the money being spent to market travel and tourism in the state.

The budget would be performance-based, she said; 2/3 would be based on performance, while only 1/3 would be from the legislature. The industry will have to work for the increase, she said, and it will take time to achieve that. The money would not just be used for advertising and promotion, she said; it would also be used for product development, enhancing what the state has to offer tourists.

"It is our belief that the state of Kansas has just scratched the surface on what it can accomplish by

increasing promotion of the many things that Kansas has to offer," she told the committee.

Too long in Kansas, she said, the tourism industry has taken a back seat to those who cannot make the connection between "tourism" and "Kansas" — this despite the fact that 2006 estimates show that visitors to Kansas injected \$7.3 billion dollars in direct and indirect spending into the state's economy and generated \$1.7 billion in federal, state and local taxes.

All of this money has come into the state despite Kansas having one of the smallest tourism budgets in the United States, Price said, but Kansas deserves better.

"For every dollar we put in," she said, "we're getting a \$55 return.

That shows we're doing something right — we just need to be doing more of it."

"Twelve travel directors in 25 years does not say much about a consistent effort and message to the industry," said Dick Carter, executive director for the Travel Industry Association of Kansas, in his testimony before the committee. "We have to curtail the revolving door effect..."

Linda Craghead, executive director of the Flint Hills Tourism Coalition, testified that Kansans need to see what a valuable resource the state has to offer in being a vacation destination and spend money to market it that competes on the same level as other states.

State schedules public hearing on power plant permit changes

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tion available at the city office.

Morris said the three main modifications in the air permit are the expansion of types of fuel that could be burned to power the plant, the nitrous oxide controls and clarification of sulfur dioxide monitoring requirements.

He said a request to burn trash, known as municipal solid waste, brings up a problem with hydrochlorine emissions from plastics in the fuel load. He said the firm is asking to allow up to 30 percent (by weight) of the fuel to be solid waste. He said alkaline scrubbers planned for the plant should remove nearly all of the hydrochlorine before it reaches the air.

He said additional federal and state requirements would come into play if the plant planned to produce more than 10 tons of hydrochlorine in a year. The current permit has a provision to limit the plant to that level.

The fuel request includes burning tire chips at a rate of up to nine tons per hour, he said, plus agriculture byproducts, wood and wood waste.

Fred P. Osman of Osman Environmental Solutions wrote to Morris on Nov. 29 that the change in fuel types was the most pressing problem. He said because of the small size of the boiler and being on a shortline railroad, it might be nearly impossible to have coal delivered at a price that would be economical.

"We are somewhat fortunate that

the boiler is a rotating grate stoker that has a capability of handling a wide variety of potential fuels," Osman wrote. "These (alternative) fuels all help promote energy independence and generally they are offsetting greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels.

"Furthermore, burning materials safely in a well controlled process to generate energy is a much better overall environmental solution than landfilling them."

He said the hearing will give the public an opportunity to comment on the proposed changes. He said

Goodland Energy Resources is not asking to change any of the emission limits in the permit, and still has to comply with the state and federal air-quality standards.

Morris said people who come to the hearing will be asked to sign in, and will have an opportunity to check a box

on the sheet if they want to speak.

He said information does not have to be in writing, but the hearing officer will accept written comments and the hearing will be recorded and become part of the record along with any written comments or letters in support or opposition to the changes.

Students study impact of power, ethanol plants

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views how the energy center has affected a lot of businesses in a positive way," wrote Andrew Ragels. "A lot of businesses have invested in the energy center and they believe it will meet their expectations."

"When we visited the Energy Center we talked with John McCulloch," wrote Eddie Ramero. "He gave us a tour of the ethanol plant and the power plant. He told us how they picked up the condenser and the coal bunkers."

"In class, we made up questions for a survey for some businesses. We got to go out into the community and interview some businesses. Our group talked with Jeannie and Randy Topliff. What I got from interviewing them was the fact the (county property) taxes would decrease if revenue went up."

Livengood said she has received great comments from the business people about the students and how they conducted the surveys.

"The best response is that the students are getting involved and are aware of what is going on in the community," said Livengood. "The businesses have sent back reviews for students to look at, and have given them valuable information on introducing themselves, how to dress, positive on how the student's conducted the surveys."

"It is good for students to get out and meet some people in the business world and see how they think on issues, and it makes the students think about how they think about the issues."

Other comments from students include: "We visited the Energy Center

and we toured it inside and out," wrote Brandon Truhler. "They explained to us what they did on a daily basis and what is made there and how it was done."

"In my interviews, I have learned Frontier Ag has gotten to sell tires and fuel and other items to the people that are building the energy plants," wrote Allen Normandin. "If trucks haul grain to larger cities they could haul back items for the energy center, such as tire chips, biomass or coal. I also have learned that tire chips will burn hotter with less chips than coal, so it will produce more energy and power."

"I learned so much on our trip to the new power plant and energy center," wrote Freda Barber. "I learned it takes a lot of preparation to build it. I learned they are putting in area that will catch CO2 (carbon dioxide)."

"We have done some research on in class on tire chips and the pros and cons of burning them. There were more pros, than cons."

"I learned from the interview with Mike Campbell (regional supervisor for the U.S. Farm Service Agency) that the energy center will help provide our county with energy and ensure cheaper electricity," wrote A.J. Stephens. "The most important thing I learned from the field trip to the ethanol and power plant was how the pipes are put together and how it's going to burn coal and biomass and how the power plant is going to help provide steam to help the ethanol plant."

"The byproducts of the ethanol plant are going to be very beneficial, too. I am really interested in learning more and would like to go back again to tour the center."



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