

# Citizens press commissioners to support bill

By Tom Betz  
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The commissioners' meeting room in the Sherman County courthouse overflowed with people, most of them there to support a bill that would allow voters electing county commissioners at-large, with every-one voting in every race.

"I think the only way is to let the people vote on it," said Commissioner Mitch Tiede.

Former City Commissioner Curtis Hurd said that was why he was at the meeting, to be sure the people got to vote on the issue.

Commissioner Chuck Thomas had said he did not support the change because people in his district said they wanted to keep the districts. The bill has been stalled in a conference committee, mostly because legislators had heard the commissioners were no longer united behind it.

Mary Volk, a member of the Shine On Sherman County Government Services Alliance, and also Goodland city clerk, said she did not believe that.

"There are people in your district who want to vote on this," Volk said.

"Let them vote," said Rob Tomsic of Toppide Office Products, and that was echoed from other people almost in unison. Members of the audience included city officials, school board members and farmers and city business people.

"I agree," Tiede said, adding: "Cynthia Strnad made a good comment that you could not go wrong by letting the people decide."

Strnad, a former county commissioner, said she believed that was true, but said she had a question

## Letter of support for bill sent to legislators

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chairman of the conference, was concerned because he'd heard all three commissioners no longer supported the bill.

"The bill is still alive," Ostmeyer said, "and the leadership said they would work with me. Rep. Burgess said he wished all three commissioners were in agreement, and that there had been community input this year."

The commissioners agreed to send a letter to Burgess and the other committee members and had County Clerk Janet Rumpel draft it. After a review by the commissioners, they each signed the letter, which was mailed out Tuesday. Copies were sent to Ostmeyer and Rep. Jim Morrison (R-Colby) who

have helped with the bill.

"We understand there has been a lot of confusion regarding whether or not this bill is supported by the Sherman County commissioners and the citizens of Sherman County," the letter said.

"We had an overflowing room full of citizens who came to our meeting to discuss the status of HB2307, and to express their concern about the bill being stalled.

"We have all agreed that this is something we will support as a commission to give them (the citizens) the option to vote on the issue.

"We are sorry for all the confusion and urge you to support the passage of the at-large option with no districts."

Tiede said after he asked the people in Topeka about doing it with districts and they said they

could not, he told them to get it passed and get it back here so the people can vote on it.

Thomas admitted he had changed his mind about the bill from last year.

"I had a lot of people in my district say they did not want it changed and they wanted to keep the districts," he said.

"I think the only way is to let the people vote on it," Tiede said.

"That is why I am here," said Curtis Hurd, a former city commissioner. "I want the people to vote on it."

The Legislature is on recess until Monday, April 28, when they return for a wrap-up session to deal with several issues, including the state budget. The bill could be passed then if the leadership agrees to advance it.

about how things got confused with the people in Topeka

"I do not understand where after the meeting when it was voted 2-1 (to support the bill), that the secretary of state's office got a call, Sen. Tim Huleskamp got a call, and why were they told something different than what was passed?"

"Why was not another commissioner's meeting called to talk about it? Things got very screwy in Topeka about what we want, and they are getting mixed signals. We are damaging our credibility by changing our minds."

Tiede said he had asked Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer (R-Grinnell) if the bill could be changed to keep the

districts but vote countywide.

"It was my mistake to ask," Tiede said. "I did not intend to cause confusion. I will take responsibility for that."

"That is not what was approved," Strnad said. "That is not helping our credibility in Topeka. It makes them wonder about us and makes us look bad."

She said she asked some questions, and got a letter from Sen. Tim Huleskamp, chair of the Senate Committee on Elections and Local Government, saying that the request to change the bill came from the chairman of the county commissioners, Tiede.

"The people use their best judge-

ment when voting for commissioners," Strnad said. "You do not want to make this about your job; this is Sherman County."

"Chuck, you make it that it is your district. Mitch is my commissioner by district, but I have been in the

lumber yard and talked to Kevin about a concern, and have seen you (Chuck) at the Farm Service Agency and had a concern.

"I sometimes feel like we are only representing our own district. That is why I have some issues. Chuck, you are a better commissioner than that. I have seen you do a better job with issues about the whole county."

"So what do we need to do?" Tiede asked.

"They (legislators) are frustrated with your conversation," Rasure said.

"I just asked the question if it was possible to keep the districts," Tiede replied.

"That was after a motion was made and passed," Rasure said.

"I told him to go back to what we went with before (at-large, no districts)," Tiede said.

"The people want a unified effort," said Alan Townsend, a county farmer.

Thomas said he had been disappointed when the bill did not pass last year.

"That should have made us get out more effort," Townsend said.

"If we don't show unified support on this, it will not pass," Rasure said.

"I am for letting the people vote on it," Tiede said.

Josh Dechant of Frontier Ag, a city commissioner, said the three commissioners need to be together, and that it was a problem when the vote was 2-1 in March when it had been 3-0 last year.

"I'll sign a letter," Thomas said.

A question was raised about holding public forums on the issue.

Thomas suggested sending the message to Topeka that the commissioners all want the bill passed, and then before the election holding forums so people know what their options are.

Trevor Linton, of First National Bank, and chair of the Shine On government task force, said he thought that group would be willing to help take on the education process.

Someone asked if sending the letter from the three commissioners was enough. Tiede said he thought it would be.

The three voted to send a letter to Rep. Mike Burgess (R-Topeka), chairman of the conference committee, and the other five committee members. County Clerk Janet Rumpel wrote a draft that the commissioners read and all three signed before it was mailed to Topeka on Tuesday.

## Nebraska firm to stripe county road

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dashed line, called a skip line by the painters, is used in the middle while the edge lines are in white. He said a white dotted line is used to divide lanes on four-lane streets and highways. He said the state transportation people came out and helped mark the no-passing zones.

Citizens asked the county to paint the stripes last fall after the road had been resurfaced last summer. Commissioners said they liked the idea if the job did not cost too much and the lines would last three to five years.

The first estimate Way had in December was about \$75,000 to do just the yellow line and no-passing zones. The commissioners asked him to see if smaller firms might do the project for less.

Way said he found the Nebraska firm by talking to other counties that

have used them for more than 10 years. He said he called their references, including Douglas, Stevens and Ellis counties.

Way said Casey Clausen from Straight Line told him they would measure to the "meet line" where the two sides of the asphalt join in the center of the road, and then set the truck to the proper distance.

Rasure asked about controlling traffic while the paint is wet. Clausen said they don't provide traffic control, but if the county wants to have a truck follow the painting it could.

"This is one way we keep our prices down," he said. "Some want to do it. If we put a sign on the truck behind the paint truck and someone gets paint on their car, it is their

problem."

Way said he could run a pickup with a beacon behind the crew.

Asked when the painting would be done, Clausen said it would be the end of May or the first part of June.

Rasure asked about the life of the paint. Clausen said there are a lot of variable, but the biggest problems are winter weather and snow plowing. He said he would expect the job to last from one to three years depending on the traffic and the weather.

Thomas asked where the money was coming from, since people are saying the county is spending more.

County Clerk Janet Rumpel said the cost would come out of the special city-county road sales tax.

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The Goodland Star-News

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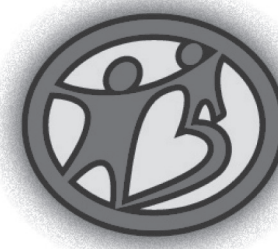
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