

City drops property tax 7.4 percent

By Tom Betz
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No one appeared to talk at the city budget hearing, and the proposed budget that drops the city property tax levy by 7.4 percent was approved unanimously by the four commissioners at the meeting last Monday.

Mayor Rick Billinger opened the budget hearing at 5:03 p.m. and asked if anyone in the small audience had any comments. Hearing none he closed the hearing at 5:05 p.m.

When approval of the budget for

2009 came up on the agenda City Commissioner Josh Dechant made the motion to approve the budget as presented.

"I think we have trimmed it where it needs to be done," he said, "and talked through all the salary figures. We said we want to send a message that we were going to cut taxes and this does that."

Commissioner Annette Fairbanks seconded the motion saying she felt it was a good budget and was pleased they were able to cut it some.

Before the vote Commission-

er John Garcia said he had been pleased with the dialogue that had taken place among the commissioners.

"I think the people should be pleased we were able to bring the tax rate down by about 4 mills," he said. "I am happy with how it turned out this year. I appreciate the city employees and feel we did a good job for the people we represent."

Garcia said he felt it was now up to City Manager Wayne Hill to use his discretion to help even out the pay for some of the city employees,

and to give raises based on performance.

"I agree that we have been able to lower it somewhat," Billinger said. "We don't all agree on everything in there. We wanted to cut a little more, but we have the best employees and worth the best we can give them. We appreciate what the employees and staff do for the city."

"The commissioners are aware the economy is not good, and we have tried to cut as much as we can and keep our services."

"I am glad we were able to cut back some."

The vote was 4-0 with Commissioner Dave Daniels absent.

Earlier City Clerk Mary Volk had said that if Daniels' vote was needed he had told her he might be available by phone, but with a unanimous vote no call was needed.

Daniels had participated in a budget workshop by phone on Tuesday morning, and said he was in favor of approving the budget as presented.

At the work session it appeared that Billinger and Garcia might vote not to approve without further cuts, and if the vote had been 2-2 it would

have been necessary to contact Daniels to break the tie.

The budget for next year will reduce the city property tax level by 4.19 mills and means a homeowner with a home appraised at \$75,000, could see city property taxes drop \$36.18, and for a commercial business appraised at \$75,000 the tax could drop \$78.66.

The total city budget increases from \$13,960,733 to \$14,442,754 (3.5 percent), but the city property tax collected could drop from \$1,381,771 to \$1,331,046, a 3.7 percent decrease.



Trevor Linton (front) spoke to the audience at the at-large election of county commissioners forum at the fair on Monday, Aug. 4, in front of the agriculture building. Darren Neufeld (back left), Brad Schields and Alan Townsend were also on the governmental services com-

mittee for Shine on Sherman County with Linton. The committee sponsored the forum. There will be other forums in September and October.

Photo by Pat Schiefen/The Goodland Star-News

Hospital board elects officers

By Sharon Corcoran
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The Goodland Regional Medical Center board elected officers, rearranged committee appointments, discussed options for buying and leasing an airplane and heard that Oberlin's hospital is interested in doing a joint peer review with Goodland.

After some discussion, the board decided at its meeting Monday, July 28, to keep the same officers for continuity's sake: Steve Riebel, of First National Bank, chair; Darin Neufeld, an engineer with Evans, Bierly, Huchison Associates, vice chair; and Joyce Moore, owner of Accounting and Tax Services, secretary/treasurer.

Riebel said he was willing to step down if anyone else wants the job. He made a motion to nominate Neufeld as chair, Patty Eckhardt vice chair and Randy Coleman secretary/treasurer.

Coleman declined, however, and Neufeld said he has seen the job as chairman takes extra time and he was concerned he wouldn't be able to do the job justice, since he doesn't usually know in advance when he might be out of town.

Riebel's motion died for a lack of second, and Eckhardt made a motion to keep the same officers. Brenda McCants, who replaced Mary Volk on the board, seconded, and it passed unanimously.

Moore, who had served on the finance committee for many years but moved to the professional committee the past year, asked to trade with Neufeld to go back to finance. Neufeld agreed, and Riebel approved the trade.

He assigned McCants to the professional committee, which Volk had served on, and Eckhardt and Doug Irvin to remain on the professional committee, naming Eckhardt to chair the panel.

Rounding out the finance committee are Jacque Drennan, Coleman and Lynn Hoelting, with Coleman as chair.

Chief Financial Officer Jim Precht discussed with the board the need to make a decision about buying or leasing an airplane to fly specialists from hospitals in Denver and Hays and the University of Kansas Medical Center to Goodland. It would replace a plane the hospital has used for years.

Precht said he found that a 1999 model would probably run in the \$2 million range. If the hospital buys a plane, rather than leasing, he said, there will be residual value in it.

Also, he said, it might be possible to hire another part-time pilot and lease the plane out to others on days the hospital isn't using it. Whether buying or leasing, he said, there will be costs involved, and there are advantages and disadvantages to both.

The hospital needs to make a decision in the next three to four months, said Administrator Jay Jolly. Precht said he would bring options to the board at its next meeting at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Aug. 25.

The Decatur County Hospital in Oberlin has asked about doing a joint peer review, Jolly said, adding that the review is an educational process. Doctors can compare notes, he said, seeing how the others have treated different problems.

Neufeld asked if people would have to go back and forth or if just records would be moved. Jolly said it would be nice to do it electronically, but he doesn't think the Oberlin hospital has electronic records yet.

"Probably we'll go there one time, and they'll come here the next," he said.

Jolly said he would be in touch with the Oberlin hospital about the review.

First of three forums on at-large voting held

The first of three forums to let people express their opinions about at-large election of county commissioners was held at the fairgrounds on Monday night. The other two will be in September and October.

Trevor Linton on the governmental services committee for Shine on Sherman County introduced the topic, saying his committee had been looking at ways city and county government and services could be combined to save money.

He said the committee itself is not for or against at-large election

of commissioners. If the county commissioners were voted on at-large, he noted, then everyone could vote on all three county seats. Under state law right now, only those in a district can vote in commission races.

The three current commissioners, Mitch Tiede, Chuck Thomas and Kevin Rasure, were at the forum.

If the county asks the state legislature to allow at-large voting, Linton said, it hasn't been decided whether the districts will be eliminated or whether the commissioner must

come from and represent a district, even though people would vote on all the positions.

After bill to allow at-large voting was killed in the last days of the 2008 session, leaders in Legislature said they'd like to see more input from residents and more agreement from the commissioners before taking up the issue again.

Thomas said it was the Legislature that asked for more feedback, not the county.

Linton said the committee had a booth at the ag building at the county fair so people can vote in a straw

poll on the issue. If a person votes yes, they want to vote at-large, and no would mean it would remain the same. It also asks for the voter's name.

"I hate to see conflict," said Harlan House. "I like what we have."

Barbara Aten asked if there was voting at-large would the commissioners still come from districts.

Kevin Rasure said that the commissioners represent the county not just a district.

People were milling around and a group of around 50 listened but few had much to say.

Some small trucks allowed under revised micro-utility vehicle ordinance

By Tom Betz
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Small, imported trucks are allowed to drive on Goodland streets under a revised city ordinance passed last Monday that mirrors requirements passed by the State Legislature.

The city passed an ordinance in May to require the owner of these non-highway vehicles to have a driver's license, liability insurance and non-highway title, and register with the police department.

City Manager Wayne Hill said the revised ordinance included state legislative language that is more restrictive and sets penalties for violation of the requirements for these vehicles.

He said the vehicle Commissioner Dave Daniels has is legal under the ordinance, but others have been made illegal under the new definition passed by the legislature.

The definition of a micro-utility truck is a motor vehicle not less than 48 inches (4 feet) wide, has a length — including the bumper — of not more than 144 inches (12 feet) long, weighs more than 1,500 pounds, can travel at more than 40 mph and has a metal cab.

Hill said that definition would eliminate a number of small utility-type vehicles from being legally driven on the city streets.

City Commissioner Josh Dechant said he was wondering about the legality of a city worker using a riding lawnmower to pull a spray rig around to kill weeds. He asked if it wouldn't be better to be using something larger.

Hill said he thought the lawnmower was an older one and that it

would have to be changed with the passage of this ordinance.

Dechant asked if Daniels' was the only one to get a certificate of registration so far.

Hill said it was the only one he knew of that had been registered with the police department.

The ordinance was approved unanimously and replaces the one passed in May.

In other business the commission:

- Approved payment requests to Sherman County for concrete work done at the intersection of Eighth and Caldwell totaling \$7,474.

- Approved payment to Miller Construction of \$131,540 for work completed on the airport entrance project.

Darin Neufeld, engineer from Evans, Bierly, Hutchinson and Associates handling the project for the city said the rest of the parking lot should be poured by the end of the week and that weather permitting the whole project should be open by the end of this week.

Mayor Rick Billinger asked about the drainage of the parking lot and the entrance road.

Neufeld said the parking lot would be drained to an inlet on the

corrections

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east side.

Billinger said he felt there were drainage problems on the entrance road and that he felt it would have been better to leave off the curb and let the water drain to the grass.

Neufeld said there were three cuts in the curb to let the water drain to the grass.

Billinger said the road seems very wide.

Neufeld said it is actually two feet narrower than Cherry Ave between the railroad tracks and Business U.S. 24.

- Approved a request for reimbursement from the Federal Aviation Administration of \$99,533 for the airport entrance project.

- Hill reported he had received an e-mail from John Toppliff and that he and attorney Jeff Mason would get together with Toppliff about the lease and purchase agreement on the old barrel hangar. Hill said he hoped to bring the revised agreement back at the next commission meeting on

Monday, Aug. 18.

- Heard a report that street sealing would begin on Aug. 11, and take several days to complete. Dechant asked about the oil price. Rich Simon, public works director said it was \$2.84 a gallon and that is where it is locked in. He said the price was \$2.25 last year or an increase of 59 cents or 26 percent. Simon said the fog seal price went up about 13 cents in July alone.

- Junk cars, race cars and demo derby cars in driveways and on streets continues to be a problem without a solution said Commissioner Annette Fairbanks. She said she had several calls about these, and that it appeared the owners have decided it is OK to have them out since representatives came to talk to the commission in April.

She said the commission did discuss the situation and a suggestion was made, but not followed up to change the existing ordinance that

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