

# Smoky Garden has long, involved 86-year history

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to purchase the land.

A flood in August 1933 took a temporary dam out, and flood waters hit again in June 1935 flooding the valley where the Smoky Garden was located.

Flood waters in June 1936 swept through the Smoky Hill valley, and Mrs. John Dyatt died while trying to escape the rising waters. The newspaper report from the *Goodland Daily News* reported Mrs. Dyatt died of shock.

“The old pavilion at the Smoky Garden was virtually destroyed by the flood waters,” the newspaper article reported, “and the remainder of the old Smoky Hill dam were washed away.”

Efforts were begun in June 1941 to rebuild Smoky Garden. The idea was to ask the federal government to create a lake and game preserve with a new dam where the old one had been, but it would be much smaller than one proposed on the Stewart property to the west, but a bit larger than the old Smoky Garden lake, the *Goodland Daily News* reported on June 25, 1941.

In 1944 the people of Sherman County circulated petitions to submit a proposal to the citizens to raise

a bond to purchase the land and rebuild the dam.

The proposal was the second time the voters had been asked to support the establishment of a new Smoky Garden, but the first required the cooperation of the fish and game commission, the state highway department and the county. The effort became so involved it was given up.

The petitions circulated in 1944 called for the issuance of bonds for the construction of a Memorial Lake honoring the soldiers and sailors of Sherman County.

Two separate proposals were on the November ballot with one calling for the county to issue \$15,000 as a county project and another for \$25,000 as a Soldiers and Sailors Memorial, making the total \$40,000.

Both issues passed that November with more than 2 to 1 majorities. The plans were developed and put out to bid and on May 29, 1947 the Sherman County Herald reported the county accepted a bid of \$38,015 to begin work on the Memorial Lake.

Work on the Soldiers Memorial Park was completed in April 1948, and water began filling the lake in May.



Kids enjoyed the old-fashioned merry-go-round, swings and slide at Smoky Gardens.  
Photo by Tom Betx/The Goodland Star-News

In March 1949 the *Goodland Daily News* reported an effort was underway to clean out the lake and to raise the dam by three feet to make the lake deeper.

In February 1958 the *Goodland Daily News* reported the county commissioners were turning the Memorial Lake over to the state forestry, fish and game commission

to develop into a state park.

In May 1959 the *Goodland Daily News* reported the Soldiers Memorial Park had been drained because of a leak in the dam, and was being repaired.

“The lake is being fixed up for your enjoyment, so show your appreciation by helping to take care of it,” said the Park board members.

“And please stop throwing cans and bottles in the water.”

In 1975 a committee decided to resurrect Smoky Garden as part of the Centennial celebration in 1976 reported the *Goodland Daily News*. The committee of Dan Harper, J.B. McClure III and other members collected more than \$30,000 in contributions to finance the dredging of the Smoky’s water channel. A private contractor was paid to pull out thousands of cubic yards of mud and lay it on the banks. The water in the Smoky got instantly clearer, the writer reported.

Scores of carp were netted from the picturesque hole under the bridge on the north end of the Smoky. The water got even clearer.

The pavilion and bath house were never rebuilt, but over the years the county erected outdoor restrooms on both sides of the lake, and Goodland Lions, Boy Scouts and other civic groups helped build picnic shelters and install barbecue grills.

The lake continued to be a place for fishing and picnics until August 2003 when the Smoky Garden board decided the lake needed to be drained to get rid of the large carp population that was taking over the lake.

The *Goodland Star-News* re-

ported the lake was drained in September 2003.

The bottom was dug out and lots of things were put in place for fish when the water was to return, however The *Goodland Star-News* reported in July 2006 when the dam was closed the water did not come back as expected. The problem, a park board member said, was the water level had gone down and the lake was dependent on a higher water level.

Dick Emig approached the county commissioners in the spring asking if he could begin the process of reclaiming the Smoky Garden and with the help of volunteers he was able to cut down all the trees that had grown up in the bottom and had burned out much of the weeds. He got some help from the county to purchase new grills and got the park mowed to make it more usable.

The park has a new entrance sign Emig got made, and the celebration held Saturday evening was to show the people what has been done. Emig said he was pleased with what has been done, but feels more needs to be done and hopes the county follows through and appoints a committee to keep the progress going in the coming years.

## Incentives approved for small business, transformers for bunkers

By Tom Betz  
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Economic Development incentives have been under discussion for a small business in town and Tuesday the commissioners agreed to approve some incentives for the business and in a related move approved splitting the cost 70-30 for electrical transformers for two ag businesses.

The city commissioners have been discussing a request for economic development incentives from Paige Harper, owner of Healthful Solutions on east Business U.S. 24, and City Manager Doug Gerber said he had included a copy of the city incentives policy approved in December.

Harper had been at the meeting earlier, but said she had to leave because she had an appointment. In her message to the commission she wanted to thank Commissioner Annette Fairbanks for coming out to see her progress and plans. She wanted to thank Brian James, fire chief and building inspector, for checking things so she could move forward.

She said she has paid about \$3,000 for renovations to date and the labor is being done by local contractors.

Mayor Josh Dechant said the commission has been talking about Harper’s request since June, and felt Harper deserved a decision.

Gerber said on a related matter the commission needed to discuss a request from Frontier Ag for electrical service to a corn bunker in the Goodland Industrial Park.

Dechant left his seat on the commission because he works for Frontier Ag, and turned the meeting over to Vice-Mayor Rick Billinger.

Commissioner Dave Daniels asked if Frontier Ag has used the \$75,000 in electricity they had expected to use at the new storage facility built to the west.

The city had previously agreed to pay for the transformer for the new storage facility.

Dechant said Frontier Ag has maxed out the power for the corn bunker the company had out there.

He said it ran about \$5,000 a month for the fans on the corn bunker and said the fans on the bins ran quite a bit.

Daniels said the city agreed to pay for the transformer because the city would get a quick return on the investment.

“We will be using electricity in the new concrete bunker for wheat,” Dechant said, “and will have more fans on the corn bunkers.”

Billinger asked if ADM has asked for electricity for the big corn bunker they are building.

Charlie Bandel, electrical distribution superintendent, said yes, ADM has asked about extending power to their bunker. He said they have not asked for city help, but felt the city ought to treat them the same as Frontier Ag.

“It is the same as the health business,” Daniels said, “but she is probably not going to generate the electrical sales for the city that Frontier Ag and ADM will.”

Dechant said Frontier Ag is leasing the ground from the Goodland Industrial Park committee.

“There is not electricity on the west side of that street,” he said. “If we (Frontier Ag) help pay to get it over there we are asking for help from the city.”

“Are we talking about transformers?” Billinger said.

“Yes, we are talking about transformers,” Bandel said. He estimate about \$14,000 for the transformer and wiring.

“It would mean there will be power for the next person,” Billinger said.

Daniels asked if the land was in the city limits.

Gerber said it was and was inside the city certificated electrical service area.

“We would own the transformer and the water,” Billinger said. “It is a city service, and they are asking the city to provide the service.”

Billinger said he felt the city ought to do something because the city would be getting additional electrical use from two businesses.

“I don’t think we ought to pay for

the whole thing,” he said, “but we need to do something.”

Commissioner John Garcia said he would not have a problem with the business paying for the transformer and the city take care of the wiring.

“They are good businesses,” he said, “and are gaining ground. I would not have a problem with doing something like that.”

Daniels said he would rather have the city pay for the transformer. He said the city always owns the transformer, and thought the city might kick in the wiring.

“Why not just do a percentage of the total cost,” suggested Rod Blake, power plant superintendent.

Billinger said with \$14,000 total for the project he suggested 50

percent.

“There is some exciting future development out there,” Gerber said, “I think you can justify 100 percent. It is what you are comfortable with. I think it is a good deal either way you go.”

Daniels said he did not have a problem with doing 50 percent.

“I would not have a problem either way,” Garcia said. “There is not a difference to me if it is 50-50, 60-40 or even 70-30.”

“I feel if we do it we should do more than 50 percent,” Commissioner Annette Fairbanks said. “We ought to look at the big picture and with what they have already done go higher than 50 percent.”

Billinger suggested 70-30 and Daniels and Fairbanks agreed that

was a good deal.

The city commission approved having the city pay 70 percent and Frontier Ag and ADM pay 30 percent. The vote was 4-0 with Dechant abstaining.

Getting back to Harper the commissioners agreed to waive all the city permits and connection fees, but not the utility deposits.

Additionally the commissioners agreed to a rebate of three months of city utility bills after she has been in business for one year.

Fairbanks said Harper gave her a tour and said she was impressed with Harper’s efforts and plans.

“We are setting a precedent on the number of people she is employing,” Dechant said. “We need some sort of scale. I see another sign about

‘opening soon’ and figure we will be asked about this from another business.”

“I think two or three months is OK,” Gerber said. “This policy is important. The best thing you can do is to keep taxes low and the utility rates low and keep the city infrastructure up. I think we can write any guidelines you want and will keep it flexible.”

“I like a flexible program to be able to something to help these small businesses,” Fairbanks said.

“It is good to have this kind of businesses,” Garcia said. “I had a men tell me he was enthused with the community.”

“It is good to have this,” Dechant said, “and to have people come to ask us.”

## City may take over development programs

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where we ought to go. Sometimes organizations have a little bump and I think this is a good reason for the city to step in.”

Commissioner Dave Daniels, who served on the original economic development council said he felt it was a good step and to proceed to the county commissioners and see what they are willing to do.

Commissioner Rick Billinger agreed it was a good idea and asked what the city needs to do to get the ball rolling.

Daniels said he felt the city needs to see if the county is willing to put in the \$50,000.

Dechant said he would like to see an agreement with the county that would be for more than one year.

Daniels asked if the city could have an agreement for five years like the contract for the trash service.

Gerber said it was possible to

have an agreement that would continue for five years and then continues on an annual basis. He said the agreement would give either side a one year out clause.

“We have to have an economic development program in place,” Commissioner John Garcia said. “We need it to be able to function, and we need to sell the county on that.”

“It is time to try something new,” Billinger said, “and I think it will be something to try.”

Gerber said the support of the commissioners is what he expected, and wanted to hear the discussion. He said he would proceed to talk to the county and try to get things in place so a director can be hired quickly.

The city has been handling the phone calls for economic development since the middle of August and Gerber said he would be looking for a place to move the development office into the city administration building.

# Frontier Ag, Inc.

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