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(Neb.)-Chadron Moves Forward With Special Election And First Pool Phase



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 02/19/2013 11:42 AM

(CHADRON)-The council chambers were full of citizens during Monday evening's Chadron city council meeting with two big ticket items on the agenda for discussion. The first in particular, a resolution to approve a professional services agreement with Burbach Aquatics Inc. regarding updating the city pool, brought various individuals and organizations out to share their feedback or provide support for the proposal. Most public comments were in support of advancing the project, while one or two remarks urged caution and reminded council members of other important endeavors, such as continuing to work on city streets.

The council had mixed feelings about whether or not to proceed. Council member Paris Fisher said he was voting the project ahead to phase one, but he still has considerable concerns, specifically regarding sustainability. Member John Gamby said he thought the council would be foolish not to take the essentially free offer that phase one provides and at least see what is available. Since Chadron State College does not own the land where the city pool sits, college officials will not be able to subsidize building assistance for the upgrade, but have said they would play a definite role in the sustainability of an indoor pool once complete. Mayor Karin Fischer and vice mayor Levi Grant said that that decision will place a heavier burden and more upfront costs on the city, which left them hesitant. Fischer said the college's time crunch also makes the project feel compressed and played a factor in her "no" vote.

After considerable discussion, the council narrowing passed the proposal with a vote of 3-2. Voting "yes" on the proposal moves the project into the first phase and also will ensure a vote of the public in order to continue. Gamby said he took comfort in knowing that the project will be at the vote of the people. Phase one includes a feasibility study to analyze how much of an upgrade the city might want or be able to afford, an estimated cost of the project, and where funding might be procured. The initial study will also look at sustainability and other factors. Phase one will not cost the city anything now, other than eventual costs associated with the public vote and any additional costs above and beyond the basic costs of phase one.

The contract voted in at the meeting does call for Burbach Inc. to be the firm of choice for the next five years should the council decide to suspend the project at any point due to lack of funds or another reason and then choose to proceed at a later time during those five years.

The second large ticket item on the agenda was whether or not to set a special election date for voters' approval of a continuation of the city's ½ cent sales tax. The current tax expires in September 2014, and the new tax would begin in October 2014 and continue for 15 years. If passed, the money would be allocated as follows: 80 percent for economic development infrastructure, 13 percent for the economic development program, and seven percent for the community development program.

If passed, the council's hope is to use the approximate \$400,000 a year revenue from the economic development infrastructure fund (the 80%) for the stormwater project slated for Main and First Streets, leaving 20 percent of funds to be used for betterment projects elsewhere around the city. The stormwater project, which would upgrade the city's storm and sewer pipes as well as city streets, is estimated at approximately \$4 million and would be fully covered over the course of 15 years by the infrastructure fund.

The stormwater project needs to be in motion in order for the state to continue their plans for the renovation of Highway 20/Third Street through town.

The special election will take place on Tuesday, April 30th.

(Questions? Comments? E-mail roxie@chadrad.com.)

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