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(Neb.)-Chadron City Council Discusses Pool Project, LB840 Funding



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 01/29/2013 09:58 AM

(CHADRON)-Members of the Chadron swimming pool committee and the community showed up at Monday night's Chadron city council special meeting to answer questions and show support of moving ahead to phase one of the project, and placing the decision of how to proceed after that into the hands of the people. Committee member Terry Owen presented information reminding council members that they had given a unanimous go-ahead in November toward collecting facts and figures on the pool project. Owen explained that it wasn't long before the committee realized that they lacked the technical expertise to obtain all the information needed, and thus had selected Burbach Aquatics as the specialist who could help them. Owen stressed that the weight of the project did not need to rest on the council; they could easily and rightfully allow the community's voters to decide whether the project will move forward or come to a stand still for lack of funds. He also emphasized that the entire committee realizes the importance of the stormwater project and are solidly backing that. He acknowledged that the timing could have been better, but he also encouraged the council to not allow either great opportunity to slip away from the city.

Dale Grant shared that the college is in need of a covered pool and although no definite time frame has been set, the college really needs to see steady progress from the city. He said every month counts when planning for a pool and when it could potentially be operational for students, so he encouraged the council to make a decision within the next 30 days as to how they were going to proceed. Grant did say the college is still very interested in partnering with the city on the pool project and helping to defray building and upkeep costs.

The council decided to place the pool project on the February 18th regular city council meeting to be voted upon at that time. Also at that meeting, the council will receive the information needed from the LB840 committee in order to approve the referendum for the stormwater project, which will tentatively be up for vote by the public on April 9th.

City manager Wayne Anderson reiterated to the council that the city owes nothing all the way up through the referendum vote. The only way the city will owe money is if they fail to move the proposal all the way to a public vote. The cost would be for services and reimbursables, which would total approximately \$20,000. If the referendum fails, the city again owes nothing. If the referendum passes, the city will owe the backloaded money (approximately \$20,000). However, those costs will be built into the cost of the project, and a portion of phase one is helping to seek funding sources.

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Mayor Karin Fischer said she was uncomfortable with the fact that the contract did not appear to have an “out” in it once it is initiated. She explained that it’s not as if the council would be searching for a way out, but she felt it was important to have an optional way out after phase one and between phases in case of any unforeseen events. City manager Anderson shared that it was understood that the city could do so if needed, but Mayor Fischer it would be better to have it in writing as opposed to a verbal agreement.

Mayor Fischer also asked for clarification as to whether two tax referendum votes could be attempted within a close time period. As it currently stands, if a vote fails, another one cannot be attempted for 23 months. However, it is unclear as to whether a second one can be attempted if the first one passes. Anderson had once alluded to the possibility of asking the public for ¼ cent tax increase to help provide money for the pool project, and the council is going to ask for a renewal of the ½ cent sales tax that expires in 2014 to help fund the stormwater project.

The council members, specifically vice mayor Levi Grant, are soliciting public comments on the swimming pool project. Grant said he is open to conversation and questions from anyone, saying now is the time to speak up. “Use it or lose it,” he said.

Also at the meeting, the council discussed five separate sections of changes to the city’s employee personnel manual. The first is in regard to the annual leave policy, which would allow new employees to access one week of their vacation at six months time instead of waiting for two weeks after one year of employment. The second change involves the way overtime is calculated, and the third would pay workers for off-duty work-related telephone calls. The fourth main change involves how traveling workers are paid for meals while on the road for work. The fifth section of changes includes minor revisions and updates that have been needed for some time. The council will vote on the changes individually at their regular meeting next Monday, February 4th.

The council also discussed the way they handle bid processes on the purchase of new city vehicles at the request of city manager Anderson, who was seeking clarification after the council’s failure to pass SUV bid specifications at last week’s meeting. Vice mayor Grant and council member Paris Fisher had a chance to explain why they voted “no” on the bid specs. Grant said even though the two are not related, he wanted to wait on the specs until after the referendum vote. Council member Bill Barth said the money was budgeted for the SUV and the truck for the public works department (the specs for the truck had been approved), so that’s why he voted “yes.” Fisher said he didn’t vote for the SUV specs based on “perception.” He said the council needs to keep in mind the feelings of the community and that it appears to be a lot of money being spent all at one time to the public. Grant agreed. Council member John Gamby, who had voted “no” on both specs, was not present at the special meeting.

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

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