



Hospital renovation plans underway

by Mark Dykes

Among the topics of discussion with regard to Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital, one that's generated plenty of talk is the planned \$16.4 million renovation and addition to the existing hospital. During Tuesday's meeting of the hospital Board of Trustees, Theresa Brigden of Vizient RE spoke via teleconference about the services the company can provide.

Brigden noted she is responsible for the consulting services Vizient offers with regard to capital and construction solutions. Among those services are working with architects, engineers, contractors and sub-contractors on projects, managing construction costs and find-

ing opportunities for clients to save not only on construction but items needed afterward, such as light bulbs and air filters.

Brigden further explained there is a team that works with the contractors and sub-contractors, to help them access the discounted pricing. Further, she said, the firm looks at what its clients are doing and will be doing, to negotiate pricing accordingly. She added Vizient can also negotiate pricing for capital purchases, such as medical equipment.

Vizient also recently expanded into architectural services, to provide further service to its customers and a full "turnkey solution," Brigden said.

Hospital CEO Margie Molitor noted Vizient does have a relationship with an architect who does design/build work. Molitor further added they would like to have someone come out for the capital equipment assessment, as the \$16.4 million tag for the project doesn't include any new capital purchases, and it's been suggested the money for such purchases be added to the capital budget over several years, so it is there when it's time to buy the equipment.

Also during the meeting, Hot Springs State Park Superintendent Kevin Skates spoke with regard to a possible sidewalk project along the

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photo by Mark Dykes

Snow showers

With quite a few inches of snow falling in Thermopolis last week, students from Ralph Witters Elementary took advantage of the fresh powder to make snow angels at LeRoy Hayes Field. After making angels, the students were invited to grab and fling handfuls of snow.

Ideas galore at airport use meeting

by Cindy Glasson

A group of around 30 citizens met at the County Annex Monday night to discuss possible new uses for the old airport.

Dusty Spomer and Wes Werbelow with GDA Engineers conducted the meeting, as their company will be creating a plan for the property based on the public's input at a number of meetings.

Werbelow said there are some things to consider when it comes to the land – short-term vs. long-term use, public, private or mixed use and the long and short term costs associated with any plan.

"Tonight's meeting is just possibilities," Spomer said. "Don't worry about costs tonight, we can work on that at later meetings."

The land in question is approximately 105 acres that includes the airport's runway and surrounding land. It does not include the golf course, as it is owned by the Town of Thermopolis.

All utilities are included with the exception of sewer service. Currently, the golf course and Stone's Throw Restaurant are using private septic tanks with leach fields.

An expansion of the water system would be needed for any major building in the area.

GDA pointed out there is the possibility of an additional access to the property via Highway 20 as the current access could be an issue depending on the final decision as to the property's future use.

There are specific points regarding the purpose and need of a plan, which include the deterioration of the facility, specifically the run-

way, that will continue to deteriorate until an alternative use is determined.

Additionally, they would like any alternatives to maintain or improve the harmony and compatibility with surrounding land.

It is hoped the public meetings will identify the highest and best use for the property, including economic impact, financial viability and support of community needs.

“Tonight's meeting is just possibilities.”

Dusty Spomer
GDA Engineers

Residential: The possibility of residential use was discussed, offering options such as multi-family housing, high-density single-family housing, low-density single-family and estates.

High-density housing would be townhouses or condominium style while low-density would be something along the line of smaller, single-family homes.

Two issues arose, one being the need to expand the water access to the area and second, the possibility of having empty lots sitting for years without anyone building on them.

Commercial: A new business park was one of the options offered for commercial use of the property along with office buildings or retail opportunities.

While those options could create new jobs in the county, the downside could again, be empty lots. The example of the Business Park south of town was used as an example of how long something like that could sit gathering dust.

Industrial: On the industrial side, the options would be heavy or light manufacturing.

New businesses of this type would increase the number of jobs in the county and could be a boon to the economy.

The flip-side would be taller buildings or towers built for manufacturing businesses that would not meet the compatibility with the surrounding area.

Recreational: The suggestion of additional green space, parks, ball fields for baseball and soccer, hiking trails and other sport related activities was offered as an alternative as well.

This alternative would have the highest compatibility with the surrounding area and would probably be the lowest cost alternative.

However, the narrow road access currently in place would be an issue with increased traffic. In addition, it would limit the growth possibilities for the land and lower the tax value. Maintenance costs would also need to be a consideration.

Two other options were presented, a mixed-use, which would be a combination of any of the above single options and a potential land swap with the State Park or other agencies.

Public comment

The floor was then opened up for public input and the first suggestion was an Airpark.

The idea was up-scale homes that include geo-thermal heating and an option to fly-in to the homes by the owners.

The project would have to be a private one as the airstrip cannot or will not meet Federal Aviation Standards.

Costs for maintaining a private airstrip for the project would be very costly and some felt it would be in direct competition with our current airport.

The Recreation District has great interest in the property, suggesting a number of things that could be re-purposed and land that could be used to expand the offerings of the district to county residents.

Agar updates on budget proceedings

by Mark Dykes

"We have a budget!" is what Senate District 20 representative Wyatt Agar reported Tuesday morning, further stating, "We voted on concurrence to HB 1 yesterday. It now is on the governor's desk." Agar noted the budget holds mainly to the original cuts in most departments. As for education, he stated, it incurs a 1.7 percent cut, or \$45 million over the next two years.

Agar further reported on two agriculture related bills he cosponsored. HB 275, which has passed, deals with drivers license revisions. "It allows farmers and ranchers to haul their produce or livestock with in a 150 square mile radius of their home property with a class c drivers license," Agar stated. "They cannot exceed 80,000 pounds gross weight. The law is similar to ones that all our neighboring states already have in place.

"As ag producers operating margins become tighter our neighbors must figure out how to do more tasks in house. This bill gives them the ability to do so with the transportation of their products to market. Every one of our neighboring states has similar laws."

A second bill is HB 270, regarding designation of wolves in specified areas as trophy game animals for purposes of compensation payments for damages, specifying applicability, providing for rulemaking and providing for an effective date. Agar noted this bill is on second reading Tuesday.

The bill "allows land owners that have property straddling the management line to opt their property as a whole into the trophy wolf management area," Agar stated. "The purpose of this is to allow the land owner to manage predation problems uniformly across their property."

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