

Concerns addressed at meeting

By Linda Schneider
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During the January council meeting on Monday, Bird City residents, Darlene Burr, Don Holliman, Ted Partch and Sherry Carmichael, were on hand. They had concerns about the construction and relocation of the sheriff's office from the city hall to the council-approved location of the city shop.

Sheriff Craig Van Allen followed his presentation of the sheriff department's monthly activity report by saying that the department is remaining neutral about the decision the council has made on the location of the sheriff office.

"It is part of the oath of the office I have taken and will not influence any decision," Sheriff Van Allen said.

However, at the end of the discussion, he stated there are many state regulations that are required that must be met for a sheriff's office to function properly and legally.

Mrs. Burr began by saying that she had been at the meeting where the issue of whether the sheriff's office or Century II Development Foundation would be located in the vacant office in city hall.

She continued by saying she understood that there had been a vote to keep the sheriff's office in city hall.

"Next thing I knew it was in the paper that it didn't happen that way," Mrs. Burr said.

She said that she read in the newspaper that Century II Development was giving a \$4,000 grant to Bird City to construct a room in the city shop and the sheriff's office was going to be there.

Mrs. Burr went on to say that she felt that it would take more than \$4,000 to construct an office for the sheriff and that it would be left up to the residents to pay by increasing the city taxes.

"You say our taxes are not going to go up, but they do anyway," Mrs. Burr said.

Mayor Troy Burr explained that during the meeting in which Cathy Domsch, executive director of Century II Development, attended asking for office space for the Small Business Center, the council said that it was preferred to leave the vacant office for the sheriff, but if something else showed to be workable the council would look at a reasonable alternative.

"We have looked at the alternative, found it reasonable and have changed our minds," said Mayor Burr.

Mrs. Burr added that looking at what construction needs to be done, it would cost more than \$4,000, and she wanted to know who is going to pay for it? Mayor Burr asked if she had a solution.

"Why not leave the sheriff's office where it is at and let Mrs. Domsch use a little house that is vacant," said Mrs. Burr.

Mayor Burr explained there are no good alternative in town and that is why it has been decided to go forward as the decision stands.

Mrs. Burr asked the mayor if the taxes are raised, are the residents just to pay them? Mayor Burr replied that is the way it usually works. Mrs. Burr sat down with a final word that many residents are not going to be too happy.

Mr. Holliman stood up and said he didn't have much to add to Mrs. Burr's statement and repeated that he didn't believe the \$4,000 was going to be nearly enough to construct to completion a sheriff's office.

One item he brought up was installing a bathroom that would be disability accessible approved.

"I just don't think \$4,000 would ever do it," Mr. Holliman said.

He asked if the Business Center would be paying rent or utilities for using the office. Mayor Burr replied no rent would be paid and the city would be paying the utilities. Mr. Holliman added that would be passed on to the residents in the form of increased taxes.

Mr. Holliman asked why the Century II boardroom couldn't be used for the center. Mayor Burr replied that the business center administration needed privacy and confidentiality between itself and the people who come in to do business and the boardroom doesn't provide it.

Mayor Burr added that the center needs to have security and segregation of information from other offices.

Mr. Holliman wanted to know if there have been any bids on the construction yet and did anyone know just how much this is all going to cost. Mayor Burr replied it hasn't been done yet.

Mr. Holliman added that he thought it is important to have what the construction is in detail so that contractors know what they are bidding on.

"This is completely different in that the city is not handling it," said Mayor Burr.

Mr. Holliman suggested that instead of the city handling the construction and costs, turn it over to Century II and allow them to oversee everything. Mayor Burr explained that the council wants to promote some progressive actions for Bird City. Mr. Holliman wanted to know what this business center is going to promote.

Councilman Wade Carmichael said it could possibly bring in some economic development. He went on to say it is not any guarantee, however, if nothing is done, nothing will be accomplished.

Much discussion followed concerning Bird City's advantage of having the Business Development Center as opposed to the center being in another city and would the center have any real influence over other cities.

"Again, we don't know anything for sure, no one does, but it could lead to potential business coming to Bird City because the center is located here," Councilman Carmichael said.

Mr. Holliman concluded by saying that if Century II wants to have the Business Development Center in Bird City, Century II should be responsible for the rent,

utilities and any construction costs that are incurred.

"I have nothing against Century II, but it was Cathy who brought this business center to town, let Century II be responsible for paying the bills," said Mr. Holliman.

Mr. Partch was in agreement with the previous speakers and added the concern about the city safe that is in the vacant office now. And how is the city going to secure information as well as have access when the Business Center will be occupying the office.

"How is council going to secure the information while a non-governmental business occupies that office?" he asked.

He continued that he understands that it is not illegal for the city to allow a business to occupy an office in city hall; however, there is a fairness that cannot be disregarded. In addition, why should the city have to pay a penny to move a government entity into another building and move a non-government entity into city hall and give it rent free?

"I think Century II should pick up the entire bill on the project," Mr. Partch said.

He went on to say that to even have city employees, Brad Schneider and Eric Bartels, do the job at the expense of the city is not right. Adding that at this point there is nothing the residents can do about the decision, but, at the next election it could be an issue.

The next topic Mr. Partch talked about was the procedural part of the voting. He asked Mayor Burr if a letter from Milliken Law Office to the city council had been received within the last month stating that there was a conflict of interest with the city attorney representing Bird City and a private individual in town, but the city council could make the decision. Mayor Burr said that he has never received a letter stating that information.

Mr. Partch went on to say that in a conflict of interest, it was to be public and in the meeting minutes. He pointed that statement to Kevin Berens, city attorney, who replied that not as long as there is a substantial interest statement on file, which there are.

Mr. Partch continued by asking that if a council member has a substantial interest in an issue to be voted, it should be public. He questioned Mayor Burr's possible conflict of interest to vote with Cindy Burr's situation and 2nd Beginnings.

Mr. Partch said that with 2nd Beginnings building presently rented to the mayor's wife and Century II cannot use it. He added that he believed that during the voting, there were two uncompromised votes one way and three votes the other, mentioning he believed Councilman Loren White's vote was not a compromised vote for Century II.

He continued saying Councilman Carmichael has a reasonable conflict of interest considering what Century II has proved in way of low interest loans and free work for his company Monte's



DON HOLLIMAN, standing, Bird City resident, spoke to the Bird City City Council Monday evening concerning moving of the sheriff's office. Also pictured, center, Cody Beeson, sheriff deputy; Craig Van Allen, sheriff; and councilman, Frank Serrano. Times staff photo by Linda Schneider

Beef Jerky.

Mr. Partch said the city council's obligation should be to Bird City first, not Century II. Much discussion followed.

Councilman Carmichael mentioned that Councilman Frank Serrano is employed by the county sheriff department and has a conflict of interest in the vote.

Mr. Partch said Councilman Serrano has no conflict about voting the Business Development Center in the city hall and the sheriff's oath is to remain neutral. He added that he could not find any incident where a city government entity was removed from a city hall to move in a private entity.

Mr. Partch ended by saying Bird City is doing Century II a favor by allowing them use the city hall vacant office, and there is no guarantee that this business center is going to do anything for Bird City.

Sheriff Van Allen said there are many requirements that are needed by the sheriff's department to run an office properly. It included space, additional rooms for suspects, a sobriety test area, handicap accessibility, and security and confidentiality.

Councilman White closed the much heated discussion with the question, "Why were these issues of requirements for the sheriff's office never discussed before?" There was no further discussion.

Later in the meeting, Sherry Carmichael, resident, said that she thought Century II has been good for the community and money that came from several donors such as Walt Eggers, was to be used for the betterment and progress of Bird City.

"I don't know why some residents are against Century II, they have made many improvements in Bird City," said Mrs. Carmichael.

She suggested that more residents consider volunteering to service on the various committees that address the different important issues concerning the town. She added that means more commitment than just sitting in a meeting once in a while.

Club Clip

McDonald Senior Citizens

The McDonald Senior Citizens met on Jan. 4, for the first meeting of the new year. Joan Tongish welcomed 23 seniors and nurse, Rose Whitehurst, to the meeting. Birthdays and anniversaries were acknowledged.

Phyllis Wingfield had decorated the tables in the variety of little animals. Owen Wingfield read a humorous reading and then led the meal prayer.

After a bounteous dinner, bingo was played, with Gladys Cullum

of St. Francis winning the blackout prize.

Following the bingo games, a business meeting was held. Joan Tongish thanked Phyllis Wingfield for the decorations and also thanked all who had helped in the kitchen and with the serving.

Committees for the Feb. 1, meeting will be Poem and Prayer: Eleanor Swihart; Prizes and Bingo: Phyllis Wingfield; Kitchen Help: Phyllis Wilkinson, Marlene Johnson and Iris McIntosh.

Deadlines set for conservation program

Kansas agricultural producers and landowners interested in protecting or improving natural resources on their land are being urged to contact their local U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office by the cutoff dates listed below to apply for a program and to be considered for Fiscal Year 2010 funding. After the cutoff date, the conservation service will evaluate and rank applications for the following programs:

Environmental Quality

Incentives Program (EQIP) cutoff date - Jan. 15.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) cutoff date - Jan. 15.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) cutoff date - Feb. 19.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) cutoff date - Jan. 22.

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program cutoff date - Feb. 15.

All Natural Resources Conservation Service natural resources programs are voluntary and may be applied for throughout the year; however, funding cutoff

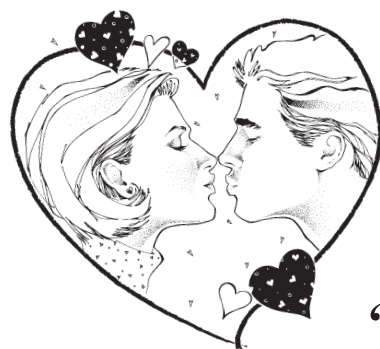
dates are set as listed above for evaluation and ranking of the signed applications.

In Kansas historically underserved, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers may receive a higher payment through Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program for structural and vegetative practices.

More information about the conservation programs listed is available on the Kansas Web site at www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov.

Coming Soon: Winter Sports Special Section

This section will feature St. Francis and Bird City Jr. High and High School Basketball players, Wrestlers and Cheerleaders!



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Bird City Times

The Saint Francis Herald

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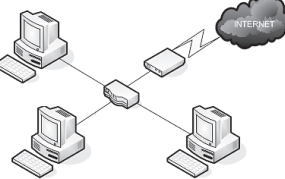
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