



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Public hearing at city hall Tax abatement discussion brings mixed comments

By **PATTY DECKER**

Free Press Editor

A public hearing on issuing industrial revenue bonds not to exceed \$1.4 million by the city for Truck Town was held Tuesday at the Colby City Council meeting and was met with a mix of comments from individuals and businessmen on the question of abating taxes.

Carolyn Armstrong, city manager, said only part of the project is eligible for a 10-year tax abatement, which would be the non-retail portion of the business covered by the industrial revenue bonds or 74 percent of the project. The remaining 26 percent or retail-side would be taxed.

In dollar amounts, and based on the tax rate last year at 153.1 mills, if Truck Town were to use the entire \$1.4 million for industrial revenue bonds, the abatement for the next 10 years would be \$47,400 a year for the 74 percent and the rest (24 percent) paid by other sources would cost Truck Town \$16,700 a year in taxes.

Armstrong cautioned that the numbers represent "best estimates" since a final project amount will not be calculated until the city decides the level of abatement.

"The city has no financial obligation to the industrial revenue bonds," she said, "we are more the vehicle for tax free bonds and for the private bond sale."

Whenever the city is involved in the issuance of industrial revenue bonds, a public hearing is required.

Joan Albers, Colby, said she believes it is a win-win situation. The city, she said, while the city won't be out "a whole lot of tax," it will bring in sales tax.

Gerry Fulwider, director of the Thomas County Economic Development Alliance, said his board was in favor of the abatement and bonds.

One citizen, Hank Vette, said he wasn't in favor of giving tax abatements in the interest of fairness.

"We didn't give Tuffy Taylor and his new business (Taylor Motors) an abatement, or to Mike Tubbs (Tubbs & Sons Ford) or Mike Woofter (Woofter Construction)," Vette said. "I know there are others who feel the same way I do."

Taylor added that Wichita has gotten themselves into a mess with the health club abatement they made recently.

While Taylor said he thinks it is great Truck Town will be moving in, he also believes the city needs to keep everything on the same level playing field.

Councilman Ken Bieber reminded Taylor that 74 percent of the business (which will not be taxed for 10 years) will not be competing with any other business — it will



Kirk Young, co-owner of Truck Town, offered input during the public hearing Tuesday night. Seated behind him was Hank Vette and Mike Tubbs.

be a truck wash and an area for refurbishing semi tractors.

"The other 24 percent will be taxed like you," Bieber said. "I think people are missing the point." Bieber was referring to the fact that Truck Town's main emphasis will be with the truck wash/refurbishing non-retail side.

Mayor Warren Hixson added that the city has a policy in place too that says they will not approve tax abatements or industrial revenue bonds if the business would be in competition with someone already here.

"In a way," said Councilman Jim Tubbs, "these are two separate parts — on the north side Truck Town will sell trucks with no abatements and on the south side of the road there will be a lube outfit — truck lube service, wash, scales, and an abatement."

However, Bieber corrected Tubbs by saying, "all is one and in one location." In other words, Truck Town, is a retail—non-retail business located on the north side of Horton Avenue almost south of Franklin Avenue and Interstate 70.

Hixson said that all tax abatements cannot be fully approved until the Board of Tax Appeals in Topka awards it.

Kirk Young, who was at the public hearing with his wife, Holly, said they plan on settling in Colby regardless. In fact, Kirk said that if this is going to cause problems, he wouldn't want to do it (ask for the abatement).

The reason the Youngs are moving their business from Oberlin to Colby is based on "traffic count," he said. The Truck Town business started in Oberlin in 1988, but now the traffic county on U.S. 36 is about 500 vehicles a day as opposed to Interstate 70 with a count of 12,500 and of those 3,100 are semi-tractor trailers.

"(Mike) Woofter has been encouraging about our business coming to Colby," he said.

Darrell Barnett, another Colby citizen, questioned Armstrong. "I read that you weren't for this deal and came out and said it in the newspaper." Armstrong responded that she might have suggested a five-year abatement as opposed to 10, but other than that she couldn't recall saying she was against the idea.

Both Barnett and Taylor said they didn't think the information got out on the specifics of Truck Town with respect to the retail and non-retail side of the business. In response, Hixson said all meetings are open, there are public hearings, the public is welcome and the information is available through media.

Mike Tubbs, co-owner of Tubbs & Sons said economic development has become a "buzz word."

"Decisions made in the next 12 to 18 months could have ramifications for the next decade," Tubbs said. In addition he asked the council to consider in its waiving taxes on businesses to consider whether or not that business (1) will enhance the quality of life here; (2) broaden the tax base; (3) set a precedent for other businesses wanting abatements; (4) make sure the incentives benefit Colby; and consideration of how many new jobs and sales tax will be generated by the facilities added.

"The development of South Range Avenue will develop regardless of how we abate taxes — investigate and answer these questions."

As for the tax abatement impact, Tubbs is not sure if it is a good idea. "Are we going to be broadening the tax base at the same rate we are taking in sales tax?" he questioned.

Councilman John Bremenkamp said they have looked a long time at this and "only time will tell" as to whether or not some deals on abatement were good to Colby.

"These are good folks (referring to the Youngs)," Tubbs said, "and there's a reason people like to come to Colby — don't short sell our town."

Following the public hearing, Hixson said no decision on issuance of the bonds or the abatement will be made until the actual bond sale.

The next step will be when Ransom Financial, the fiscal agent for the bonds, brings an ordinance to the city for the sale of the bonds, legal notification will be sent to the *Colby Free Press* and from there the item will reappear on the city council's agenda, he said. The bond counsel, Kevin Cowan with Gilmore and Bell, Wichita, is handling the legal-side of the procedure and will be responsible for preparing the ordinance.

Christmas cheer!



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Sacred Heart School fifth graders Rachel Juenemann (left) and Katera Harter loaded toys for Toys for Tots Wednesday at the school. All of the students at the school donated toys, which will be given to Genesis of Thomas County. The drive was through the Kiwanis Club.

Colby School Board talks about insurance, contracts

By **TISHA COX**

Colby Free Press

The Colby School Board had a brief but busy meeting Monday at the Administration Building.



K. Nielsen

The health insurance fund was at the top of the list, along with administrative contract extensions.

Superintendent Kirk Nielsen said money needed to be transferred into the health insurance fund to keep it viable.

"We'll have to do it every year," he said.

The board approved transferring \$13,570 into the fund through June.

Nielsen said there haven't been any "huge" claims.

District financial officer Jo DeYoung said if the district can afford it, it should continue the transfers until June and see how it does.

She said budget transfers are done all the time and if anything changes, the transfers can be adjusted.

"We're in good shape right now," she said, adding the board has budget authority until June.

Contract extensions were also on the agenda.

The board approved contract extensions for high school principal Brian Kraus, middle school principal Rob Ross, grade school principal Terrel Harrison, activities director Jeff Quenzer and curriculum director Diana Wieland through June, 2006.

The motion passed 5-1, with board member John Cranston voting against it.

In other business, the board approved:

- The 2005-2006 academic calendar.
- An emergency substitute license for Kari Ross.
- The resignation of Cathy Carney.
- Hiring of Kylie Nye, counseling/career department secretary and special education para Kristie Pollonais.

The board will next meet Monday, Jan. 17 at 7 p.m. at the administration building. Items on the agenda will include a curriculum presentation on the school improvement plan, the budget, coordinating council recommendations, and a letter for negotiations.

College Wellness Center gets good assessment

By **PATTY DECKER**

Free Press Center

Based on the completion of a feasibility study recently, plans for construction of a multi-million dollar health and wellness center on the Colby College campus was positive, said Nick Wells, executive director of



N. Wells

the college's endowment association.

The news was presented by Robert Swanson of Emporia, representing Hartsook, a Kansas-based company specializing in fund raising, to the Colby College Board of Trustees at a special meeting held earlier in the month.

Wells said late last week that the assessment, which was done by conducting an interview-survey process in mid-September, found

the addition of such a center would be "tremendously positive" for the college and community.

The idea for this project, Wells said in an earlier article, was to use a company like Hartsook to help Colby College develop a fund raising campaign for the new center.

"This is the second largest fund raising corporation for nonprofit organizations in the nation and I have known Bob (Hartsook) for a long time and look forward to working

with him," Wells said.

With the assessment complete, Wells told the trustees that the \$6 million campaign can begin soon for the \$4.5 million building to house the new health and wellness center, \$1 million for endowment scholarships and \$500,000 for a campus enhancement and improvement fund. "We are in the process of starting to raise money," Wells said, but no other details were available at the special meeting.

Briefly

County offices close Friday, Monday

All offices in the Thomas County Courthouse will be closed on Friday and Monday for the Christmas holiday.

Free Press will not publish Friday

The Colby Free Press office will be closed Friday and no newspaper will be published, said Publisher Tom Dreiling. The office will reopen Monday, Dec. 27, at 8 a.m. The Free Press staff wishes everyone a happy and safe holiday season.

Senior Center announces holiday closings

The Colby Senior Progress Center will remain closed all day on Thurs-

day and Friday in observance of the Christmas holiday. There will be no meals or home delivery on those days and the senior van will not be operating. The center will re-open at its regular times from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday, Dec. 27.

Gaither Christmas concert

A Gaither gospel video concert entitled "Christmas, A Time for Joy" will be shown at 6 p.m. Sunday at Colby Wesleyan Church.

Fish/game licenses available Saturday

The Thomas County Clerk's office said the 2005 fish and game licenses and trout stamps will become available starting Saturday. For questions, call the clerk's office at 462-4500.

Colby
Oakley
Hoxie



Minus 32 recorded here in 1989

Before we get into the forecast, it should be mentioned that on this date in 1989, Colby experienced its coldest temperature ever when the mercury dropped to minus 32 degrees.

Now the forecast: **Tonight...**Cloudy with a 40 percent chance of snow. Lows around +5. Southeast winds 5 to 10 mph shifting to the east after midnight. **Thursday...**Cloudy with a 30 percent chance of snow Highs around 11. Northeast winds 5 to 15 mph with higher gusts. **Thursday night...**Mostly cloudy in the evening then becoming partly cloudy. Lows 3 below. Southwest winds 5 to 10 mph. **Friday...**Partly cloudy. Highs in the mid 20s. West winds 5 to 10 mph. Friday night...Partly cloudy. Lows around 12. **Christmas Day...**Partly cloudy in the morning then clearing. Much warmer. Highs in the mid 40s.

The numbers

- Tuesday's high, 38
- Low this morning, 17
- Year ago today, 48 and 27
- Records for this date, 69 in 1933 and -32 in 1989 (coldest ever)
- Precipitation past 24 hours to 8 a.m. today, 0.00
- December, 0.00
- Snowfall, 0.00
- Soil temperature, 34

The sources: The forecast is from the National Weather Service, and other numbers are from the Northwest Research-Extension Center, Colby. A recorded forecast updated throughout the day is available by calling (785) 899-7119. Current temperatures are available by calling 460-TEMP.