

City struggles to find power alternatives

By Tom Betz
The Goodland Star-News
A recent spike in fuel adjustment charges on power bills created quite a stir, and City Manager Ron Pickman told the city commission Monday that it may happen again some day.

He said he and Ed Wolak, public works director, had doing research on power supplies, talking with the Kansas Municipal Electric Association and the Nebraska Power Pool about purchasing power from a source other than Sunflower Electric.

"We found a possibility of purchasing power from a system in South Dakota," he said. "however, we ran into a block when one of the many people in the mix was out of

town.

"That points out the difficulty we face in trying to find alternative sources of power. Then we face the problem of the transmission lines and the fact we only have one line coming into the city."

The line that connects the city to Sunflower is 7.5 miles long and belongs to the city, and Pickman said it would cost \$250,000 per mile to build another.

Colby has a much easier time because they have three power lines coming through their area, including Sunflower, Midwest Energy's main line (which ends at Colby) and a large north-south transmission line east of town.

"We might be able to purchase other power, but then the problem

is having capacity available on the lines to be able to move it to our system," Pickman said. "The good news is that the fuel adjustment cost for April was back down to where it had been before the spike in March. That means that a customer with 650 kilowatts of usage will see a fuel adjustment charge of \$2.30, which compares to the \$25 last month.

"Our sources tell us that the cost of power will continue to rise over the next several months,, and we may see those higher fuel costs as well."

The spike in fuel costs was caused by a delay in the restart of the Sunflower plant at Holcomb. While it was down, the city had to purchase power on the open market at

a higher cost. The price to the city is normally about \$32, but for March the cost was \$65 per megawatt.

"We have been told the price will continue to go up because the natural gas prices are going up," Pickman said. "They have said to expect this to continue for up to the next two years.

"A few years ago we never expected the cost of power to get to \$40 per megawatt," Wolak said, "and would not have believed it would go over \$50. Now they are telling us that we can expect to see prices anywhere from \$75 to \$85 in the next few months."

Pickman and Wolak showed the commissioners the maps of the power grid for the area, and for the

surrounding states which show the major power lines.

"Years ago, it was not a problem to get power," Pickman said, "but today with the pressure on the power grid from California and the East Coast, the power is flowing to where the money is. The problem for Goodland is that we want to pay \$30 per megawatt, but there are city's many times our size and with larger power needs who are willing to pay the much higher rates."

Several commissioners asked about other alternatives including producing the power from the city plant. The answer from Wolak was that the plant can only produce so much power using natural gas, and that the Environmental Protection Agency has regulations concerning

the emissions if the plant runs on diesel fuel.

"We are lucky that we can produce our own power," he said, "but we may find it more expensive in the future."

Pickman said the city has a contract with Sunflower for 4 megawatts of power, but additional power needs have to be filled at a higher cost. He said the city entered into the firm power contract two years ago, and that is up for renewal at the end of this year.

"We don't know if we will be able to negotiate a new firm power contract," he said, "and we will try to get a higher amount if possible. I am sure there will be a different price even if we are able to get a new contract."

Cheerleaders hard at work



Goodland cheerleaders held a car wash Saturday at Wal-Mart, keeping busy despite the clouds and occasional sprinkles. Washing, drying and vacuuming were Courtney Dienes, Megan Sheldon, May Davis, Erinn Abernathy, Kara Angelos, Lacy Stephens, Amy Anderson, Shannon Johnson and Katie Hurst.

Coaches Shelly Angelos and Sabrina Twombly kept a watchful eye on the process, and helped when there were extra cars. Laruen Gray, Jocelyn Lucas and Vanessa Crotinger helped make the posters for the car wash.

Photo by Tom Betz / The Goodland Star-News

Mental health asks same budget

Representatives of the High Plains Mental Health Center asked the Sherman County commissioners last Tuesday to keep the county's contribution the same as last year.

Walt Hill, interim executive director of the 20-county group, was accompanied by Meripat Bowman, executive director of Goodland's Golden West Community Services, who is the chairman of the health center board, and Tracy Hillmer, manager of the Goodland office. Karen Berry, head of consultation and education for High Plains, also was present.

Hill said the group is facing a tough year, with cuts from the state budget. He said some cuts are being restored, but he is not sure how much. The group was facing a total cut of \$225,000.

"Our board is not asking for more...", Hill said. "We are going to try to be more efficient and increase patient revenue."

He said overall, High Plains is seeing 5 percent more patients while the county money has remained pretty stable.

"There is always a deficit between the money and costs of service in Sherman County," Hill said. "We are seeing 3 percent more patients, and have a 21 percent in-

crease in hours of service, which leaves a \$61,000 deficit in Sherman County."

Hill said with the state and local money flat, the only ways they have to increase revenue is through patient fees and trying to cut down on the paperwork. Currently, he said, Sherman County has a property tax levy of \$30,000 for mental health.

Looking at the county's statistics for the past year, he said counselors saw 269 people and 27 percent of those were 18 and under.

"This is not unusual," Hill said, "and it is actually lower than the other counties."

Of those seen, nearly half — 47 percent — have an income of \$10,000 or less, he said.

"We are weathering tough times," Berry said, "and that applies to what we are hearing from the patients as well."

Hill said that since the Goodland center is getting busier, they may try to add a person for four days in Goodland and one day in Colby.

Hillmer asked the commissioners if they had any questions.

Hill complimented Bowman on her new position as board chair. The commissioners said they would be looking at the budget in the next few months.

Bids approved for summer street sealing project

The city will continue its street sealing project this summer with about one-third of the streets to be sealed, and the city commission has approved a contract with B and H Paving of Scott City to handle the work.

At the meeting Monday, the city commission approved the bid from B and H for a total estimated cost of \$158,178.

The other bidder was APAC - Kansas, Shears Division of Emporia, with a bid of \$203,292.

Pickman said B and H has been working with the city over the past several years.

Commissioner Dave Daniels asked what happens if there is a problem with the sealing in a particular area. He said that several years ago when the street was done in front of his home, none of the seal material stuck to the street and nothing was done.

Pickman said there is a performance bond in the contract, and that the people from B and H have been good about fixing things while they are here.

They budgeted for 278,048 square yards of sealing, Pickman said.

"We do have funds to do this project this year," he said, "but we're not sure of next year. This is from the gas tax, and we do not know what we will receive from the state."

"This is one of the programs that may be affected by the current state financial crunch."

Commissioner Chuck Lutters asked Ed Wolak, public works director, if there was a way the city could smooth some of the bumps at some intersections before they are sealed.

Wolak said the proper way would be to mill the top off, but he is not sure they can do that.

Mayor Rick Billinger asked if the city has a milling machine, and if it could be used to handle these

bumps.

Pickman said the city does have a small milling machine, but he is not sure it will handle these properly.

"We will look at what we can do," Wolak said.

Commissioner Dean Blume made the motion to accept the bid from B and H Paving at a rate of 56.8 cents per square yard. Lutters seconded and the motion passed 5-0.

In other business the commission:

- Approved accepting a historic grant from the Kansas Department of Transportation to replace the brick intersections at 11th and 12th with Main Avenue. This will include replacement of the storm sewer lines at the 12th Street intersection at an additional cost of \$60,000. For the city, the 30 percent match for the brick replacement will be \$123,000. Pickman said the city has \$113,000 match money budgeted this year, and the rest will have to be budgeted for next year.
- Approved a bid from Bruce Baird at \$20 per hour for contract mowing of weeds and grass on city lots as a nuisance abatement. This is for the calendar year. The city will give Baird a list of lots that need to be mowed after the property owner has been given a chance to get the weeds cut.
- Approved payment requests from Evans, Bierly, Hutchinson and Associates for their work on two project dealing with the airport. One project, for the land acquisition for

a new safety zone, was for \$3,079. The second is for work on the replacement of the runway and taxiway lights. The payment is for \$1,578.

- Approved selling used street paving bricks at 20 cents per brick.
- Approved the application for a 3.2 beer license for Kabredlo's at Eighth and Caldwell, which opened Tuesday under the management of Carolyn Smith.
- Approve payment of city bills totaling \$85,881. Included was an appropriation for \$5,873,573 which includes the investment account of \$5,632,000. Pickman said this is the amount that is being invested to make some interest while the money is waiting to be spent. He said the city has \$7.1 million in re-

serve with \$1 million in the electric fund; \$765,000 in water; \$1.75 million in equipment replacement; \$413,000 in sewer and \$3 million in capital reserve. He said all the money is earmarked, and that once the money put in these accounts, it can't be spent or used for another purpose.

- Held a closed-door session for 10 minutes to discuss the acquisition of property. No action was

taken.

The next city commission meeting will be 5 p.m. on Monday, June 2, upstairs at the City Administration Building. If the door is locked, push the buzzer and as the dispatcher to let you in.

Internet tonight!
899-2338

Steever Water Park Opens Tuesday, May 27: 4 - 7 p.m.

Three day only \$1 admission for everyone
Tuesday, May 27 - Thursday, May 29, 4-7 p.m.

Friday, May 30, 1-7 p.m. public swim
Saturday, May 31, 1-7 p.m. public swim

Regular hours effective June 1: M-F, 1 - 6 p.m. public swim; Saturday, 1-7 p.m. public swim; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. public swim
Adult Swim: Tuesday and Thursday 12-1 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 6 - 7 p.m.
Water Aerobics: Wednesdays 6 - 7 p.m.
Rates: Age 0-5 \$1, age 6 - 12 \$2, Age 13 and up \$3, Adult swim \$1. Swim lessons - \$20 per child. Private party - \$150 for 2 hours.
Coupons: 25 for \$20, 50 for \$35, 75 for \$50, 100 for \$65.

Swim lessons: June 2 - 13 Session 1
June 16-27 Session 2
July 7 -18 Session 3
July 21 - Aug. 1 Session 4
Sign up for Session 1 will begin Tuesday, May 27. To sign up stop by Steever Water Park during public swim hours or call 899-4565 and ask to speak to Josh or Amber.

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