

City raises trash fee to \$15 per month

By Tom Betz
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On a 3-2 vote, the Goodland City Commission approved an ordinance raising the monthly rate for residential trash pickup by \$1 per month to \$15, beginning in March. City Commissioner Josh Dechant, who voted for the increase, said he did not like to have to raise the fees.

The ordinance increases the commercial rate from \$13 a month to \$14. In addition to the base rate commercial businesses are charged a tipping fee of \$2.10 per collection and per container.

Mayor Rick Billinger, who voted against the raise, said he did not feel the commission had been given enough information. He said he had taken the figures that Chuck Redlin, owner of In the Can, the county's trash contractor, had given them and he said he thinks the firm is doing better than what Redlin says.

Commissioner John Garcia said he had been reading the city's contract with the county and felt it would cost the city about \$100,000 to get out of the agreement rather than letting it continue.

"We are here to represent the people of Goodland," Garcia said. "I guess they (In the Can) are making a little money. I know they want an increase, but I think we need to see the figures. I think there is going to be some surplus money."

"I think Redlin does a good job," Billinger said. "I think as a commissioner that it should be justified."

Daniels said that Redlin's company needs to make enough to be able to replace its equipment.

"You are right in that the county has signed a

five-year contract and that Redlin would have it paid for in that time," Daniels said. "He has been paying that equipment off."

"The equipment is getting old, and he said he has not been able to put money aside for replacement. He is nursing it along to get new equipment."

Garcia said in order to justify a raise, there should be something in the contract with the county to provide the commission with more information and figures to show why an increase is needed.

"We are not tied to the county," Garcia

said. "We could get out of the contract with the county. I am not sure that is what we want to do...."

"I read that contract three times over. We do have a choice. As I said I don't know that is where we want to go."

Billinger said he had figured the fuel costs Redlin gave and felt that it was not reasonable to ask for a \$1 increase per house.

Daniels made a motion to approve the increase. Dechant seconded and Commissioner Annette Fairbanks joined in voting to pass the ordinance. Billinger and Garcia voted no.

Christmas on Us winners spend loot on bed, refrigerator



Grand-prize winner Robert C. Robben and his wife Cindy went shopping Monday, Dec. 17, and last Friday with the \$1,200 in scrip he won in the Goodland merchants' 10th annual Christmas on Us drawing. He handed about \$600 of it to Sharon Bowker (above) at Elliott's for a new bed, then went down the street to McClung's Appliance and Furniture, where the couple spent the other half of the money on a new refrigerator (right). Photos by Pat Schiefen and Tom Betz/The Goodland Star-News



County adds road and bridge position

By Tom Betz
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With the approval of two county commissioners — and the third opposing — the road and bridge department got approval Tuesday, Dec. 18, to move an existing employee into an assistant operator position able to cover a variety of jobs and then advertise for another operator.

Curt Way, public works manager, and Steve Goodman, road and bridge supervisor, had asked the commissioners to add a position to help in the office at the meeting on Dec. 12, but Commissioner Chuck Thomas delayed a vote because Commissioner Mitch Tiede was not at the meeting and Commissioner Kevin Rasure had said he was not in favor of adding an employee.

"If you can utilize this person as a roustabout, it looks like it would be a good benefit," Tiede said on Tuesday. "If he can be used in a variety of positions, that would work. If you're just hiring a person as a mechanic in the shop, I don't see that."

Way said the person he has in mind could

help in the shop, run errands and help with the landfill taking the bales out.

"I think we are talking about a jack of all trades," Thomas said.

"I have expressed my disapproval," said Rasure, who had questioned Way and Goodman about the need for another person in the shop.

He said he could see using an existing employee, but could not see adding a new person.

Tiede asked Way if he had money in the salary budget, and Way said he did.

"I think you are just filling a position you had not filled," Thomas said. "I think it is OK with me."

Thomas asked if a motion was needed. County Clerk Janet Rumpel said the commissioners needed to give permission.

"Yes, I guess," Tiede said. "You won't start this person right a way?"

Way said he has not talked to the person he had in mind, but would probably start him in January.

Way said he had talked to the commissioners about a job for a mechanic assistant and

operator about a year ago, and was asking for permission to fill that job. He said he felt it would be good to have a person to chase parts and work on some pieces of equipment. Tiede said Way had talked to him about a year ago and he said maybe.

Way said the department was down two people from three years ago because one retired and one quit. He said he did not fill one of those positions.

Thomas suggested the person could be used to haul gravel or help at the transfer station and landfill.

Way said there are times when Goodman or Ryan Johnson is sick or unavailable. They need another person, as there is always something going on in the shop.

"If one of us is out in the county," Goodman said, "and there is something that needs a second person, it has to wait until we get back."

"You are thinking of using an existing person and then advertise for an operator?" Tiede said. "Someone who is already experienced with the equipment and different jobs?"

"Yes, that is what we are thinking about," Way said.

Government offices closed for New Year's

Government offices, businesses and banks will be closed Tuesday for New Year's Day, and some will close on Mondays as well.

The Goodland Star-News office will close early Monday and will be closed on the holiday. No Tuesday paper will be published.

Goodland city workers will have an extra day off, as the offices will close Tuesday, Jan. 1, for New Year's Day but will be open Dec. 31 and for regular hours, 7 a.m.-4 p.m. starting Wednesday, Jan. 2.

County offices will be closed Tuesday along with the landfill and transfer station.

The post office and state and federal offices will close Tuesday for New Year's. There will be no mail pickup or delivery. The post office will be open regular hours on New Year's Eve. All banks will close for the holiday but open other days.

The Goodland schools will re-

open Wednesday, Jan. 2.

The hospital will be open, but the business offices will close early on New Year's Eve and be closed for the holiday. Of course, the emergency room will be available 24 hours every day.

The Goodland Family Health Center will close at 3:30 p.m. on New Year's Eve and be closed New Year's Day.

corrections

The Goodland Star-News will correct any mistake or misunderstanding in a news story. Please call our office at (785) 899-2338 to report errors. We believe that news should be fair and factual. We want to keep an accurate record and appreciate you calling to our attention any failure to live up to this standard.

Wheat nearly double last year's price due to drought, floods, low stocks

By Kevin Johnson
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With wheat nearing \$10 a bushel, due to what experts are deeming a "perfect storm" of drought, floods and low stocks around the world, the price is rising to record levels — nearly double the price just a year ago.

Wheat jumped from \$5.25 on Dec. 19, 2006, to \$9.94 the same day this year. (The price was down to \$8.76 in Goodland by Thursday, however.)

Reasons for the jump in wheat prices are, says Cornerstone Ag Manager Eric Sperber in Colby, "like an onion."

"There are about 10 different layers," Sperber said. "It is a combination of 'foodflation' fears, fairly tight stocks on wheat around the

world, back-to-back years of below average crops in Australia, back-to-back poor European crops."

"Foodflation" is a term agriculture experts have used to describe the increased cost of food around the world as costs soar and supply stocks drop. This, along with increasing use of corn and soybeans to make fuel, have sparked a sort of panic around the globe. Markets such as India, once a big exporter of wheat, are now becoming a major importer due to a more stabilized economy and standard of living, which in turn means a healthier and more stable diet.

"Consumption is rising in Asia as prosperity increases and diets shift from vegetables to meat, adding to the pressure on feed wheat markets," wrote Carl Mortished,

international business editor for Time Online. "The basic ingredients of prosperity in developed countries — cheap food and cheap fuel — are no longer guaranteed."

"It is hardly surprising that in countries, such as India, where climate change could have a dramatic impact on food production, there are urgent calls to stockpile grain ahead of the next harvest. India had warned earlier this year of a tender (offer to buy) almost 500,000 tons but the government this week signaled that it would be taking 795,000 tons."

"The aggressive market intervention from a country that was until last year a net exporter of grain reflects mounting concern that global stocks of wheat are dwindling as the world demands greater supplies."

"The current state of the world economy has affected not only the grain prices but oil and the whole gamut of commodities," Sperber said. "You can think about and look at the effect primarily in agriculture, but it is having a much bigger effect overall."

"A lot of people are saying we have reached the end of an era of cheap food," said Lon Frahm, a Thomas County farmer. "All commodities worldwide are at a new level; not just wheat, but commodi-

ties like copper and oil as well."

Frahm said a lot of the problem, at least in the U.S., is because the dollar is so weak.

"You buy and sell at a world price," Frahm said, "and you have to convert to the dollar, which is 30 percent weaker than some markets."

"As for the local economy," Sperber said, "the increased price of wheat has been a good deal for the producers."

"The thing we got to remember about all this is that \$9 wheat means

very little locally, because most have sold their majority of wheat several dollars ago. The impact is very small in this area right now because people don't have a lot of wheat to sell at \$9. We had a lot of wheat to sell at harvest time at good prices, but certainly not as high as it is now."

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During this holiday season and every day of the year, we wish you all the best.


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