

## City approves budget, property tax increase

By Tom Betz  
The Goodland Star-News

Two people spoke at the city budget hearing Monday, one saying the property tax increase was not large enough, and the second saying the increase was too much of a burden on businesses.

The increase, and a proposed raise for city employees, passed in spite of the lone voice of protest.

"This may be the only time I have voted to raise taxes," said Mayor Rick Billinger when the commission voted unanimously to approve the budget and the property tax increase.

The room was crowded, and most of the 30 people were city employees who were there to see if they were going to get the 75-cents-an-hour raise included in the budget.

Curtis Hurd, a former commissioner, was the first to speak when the budget hearing opened.

"I don't think you went far enough," Hurd said. "I don't think this

will hardly cover the cost of the gas increase. It seems like we wait until it is a crisis to raise (the property tax rate) three or four mills.

"It would be better to raise three-quarters of a mill every year rather than three to four every few years."

Hurd said he remembered being on the commission and trying to raise the property tax a little every year, but that everyone wanted to keep the taxes down and they were using up the city reserves.

"I think it is better to look at raising a small amount each year," he said.

"This may not be part of the budget," he said, "but when are you going to give us (citizens) a chance to vote on a bond issue to repair our streets.

"At least put together a plan and give us a chance to vote on it."

Donna Swager, manager of Wheat Ridge Acres and chairman of the Chamber of Commerce board, said she was there to protest.

"I feel you need to look at your budget," she said. "It is hard to do business in Goodland because the costs are already higher here than the other eight places we have facilities.

"I am opposed to the 75-cents-an-hour pay rise. It makes it hard to compete with the pay, and puts the squeeze on me from both ends.

"I wonder if you have looked at the number of employees. There are less people here than there were 10 years ago, and I wonder if the employees are less than the number we had 10 years ago.

"I know the city pays the insurance costs, and think insurance should be considered as part of the salary. "Property tax is high here."

Monday afternoon, Courtney Warden, chamber manager, sent a letter out to the chamber board and a few other members suggesting they attend Monday's city commission meeting.

In the letter, she said the "city council is meeting tonight about

giving their employees a 75-cents-an-hour raise, which means an increase in our property taxes and water rates. ... If you are opposed to this decision, please attend the city council meeting... The Chamber will be there representing our merchants, but I think we need them to be accountable."

When Swager spoke at the hearing, she did not specifically say she was there to represent the Chamber, but rather seemed to speak as the manager of Wheat Ridge Acres. Warden was present, but did not speak.

Commissioner Chuck Lutters said he believed the city employees were being paid fairly and that the school district has more higher paid employees than the city.

"I think we should all watch the cost of government," Swager said.

"I think we do watch," Billinger replied.

"I don't think it is wrong to give raises," Swager said, "but this seems

pretty high. I pay six times higher cost here than in Burlington."

"We have to stay even," Billinger said. "I don't think we have gone up very much."

"I believe the average amount of taxes has gone up about \$17 in the past five years," Commissioner Dean Blume said.

"It may not be outrageous," Swager said, "but it is higher than our other locations."

Billinger said he did not believe the city property tax rate is as high as some of the neighboring communities, and more of the total property tax rate is from the schools and the county.

Billinger asked for any other comments from the audience, then closed the hearing.

The commission approved an ordinance setting out the reasons for the tax increase. City Manager Ron Pickman said the ordinance was required by state law. He said the difference between the budget amount

for this year and the proposed budget for next year is \$84,969, which is 3.6 mills of property tax.

With the property tax ordinance approved, the commission turned to approval of the budget. Blume made the motion to approve the budget and Lutters seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Billinger said he appreciated the comments, and that he was not in favor of raising taxes.

He said with the cuts the state has made in revenue sharing to cities, he did not see any other way to make up the difference, but he would be the first to lead the drive to cut taxes if the state started giving back some of the money in the future.

The increase in property tax will mean the tax bill on a house valued at \$50,000 will increase by \$22.42 for the city taxes. The total amount of property tax may vary because it will include the school district and county property taxes which have yet to be established.

## Fire department investigates leak

By Kathryn Gurfinkel  
The Goodland Star-News

Just before midnight Tuesday, the Goodland Fire Department was called out to the Frontier Equity Co-op to investigate a suspected leak of anhydrous ammonia.

Scott Gilmer, assistant fire chief, said he arrived on the scene and suited up in full bunker gear with an air pack to investigate the odor.

Gilmer said he and another firefighter found a slow leak on a valve of one of the tanks, which they quickly sealed. Another eight firefighters were on standby at the scene.

Lance Keys, fertilizer manager of the Coop, said the valve had cracked open a little bit. He said the tank had just come in from a farmer and

was only about 5 percent full when it began to leak.

"It had been in the yard for only three hours when it started leaking," he added.

According to Gilmer anhydrous ammonia gas dissipates on its own, but it can be dangerous if it is near people.

The Coop is away from any houses, he noted, so it was not a public danger.

The leak didn't cause any damage and Gilmer said the tank can still be used.

Although ammonia can be used in the production of methamphetamines, Gilmer said he didn't suspect theft.

"I think it was just the packing on the valve," he said.

Sherman County Sheriff Doug Whitson did file a report on the theft of anhydrous ammonia at 6:45 a.m.

Tuesday at Dorman Brothers LLC on Road 21. He said Tony Sieck, a Dorman employee, noticed a leak and reported it to the sheriff's office. Whitson said there is no way to tell how much anhydrous was taken and it is almost impossible to identify a suspect.

"Not on these," he said. "We never get a suspect. We just file it in case we get something on it. It's pretty cut and dried."

## matters of record

**Goodland Police**  
The following crimes have been reported to the Goodland Police Department:

**August 3** — Andrea J. Horney reported criminal paint damage to her car in the amount of \$250 at 300 W. 8th.

Frank M. Tabor reported the theft of money for a video game that was paid for and not received at 823 Cattletrail.

George M. Lammers was arrested for battery of Michael D. Hopper, a law enforcement officer, and for charges from the state of Kansas for obstruction and reckless driving at 800 Broadway.

**Marriage Licenses**  
The following marriage licenses have been issued by the Sherman County District Court:  
Daren Chad Turner and Debra

Kay Grenville, both of Goodland.  
Cesar Israel Rodriguez and Melinda Benavides, both of Goodland.

**District Traffic**  
The following fines were paid in the Sherman County District Court:  
**July 12** — Emily V. Wilson, 20, Winfield, was fined \$177 for speeding.

Linda S. Kent, 39, Elgin, was fined \$126 for speeding.

Linda S. Kent, 39, Elgin, was fined \$10 for failure to wear seat belt.

Patrick D. Dillard, 30, was fined \$240 for speeding.

Carolyn L. Potts-Smith, 53, Denver, Colo. was fined \$90 for speeding.

Johnny Garcia, 48, Denver, Colo. was fined \$103 for overweight limits on wheels and axles.

Michael A. Trujillo, 65, Escondido, Calif. was fined \$114 for speeding.

## Sherman County Democratic Results

NAMES OF CANDIDATES	ROBERT A. CONROY		TIM PETERSON		MITCH TIEDE		JOHN P. MCCOOL	
	LEE JONES	UNITED STATES SENATOR	STATE SENATOR 40TH DIST	CO COMM 2ND	SHERIFF			
WARD ONE	19	28	40	51	27			
WARD TWO	19	12	27		14			
WARD THREE	14	20	23		19			
WARD FOUR	15	18	29	16	25			
KANORADO	2	4	5		3			
GRANT		3	4		2			
IOWA	1		1		0			
ITASCA	4	2	3		3			
LINCOLN		4	2					
LLANOS								
LOGAN	5	4	7		2			
McPHERSON								
SHERMANVILLE								
SMOKY	1	1	1		1			
STATELINE								
UNION								
VOLTAIRE	6	2	9	9	6			
WASHINGTON								
ADVANCE	21	17	29	31	25			
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>127</b>			

## corrections

A story on the Sherman County commissioners on Page 7 of the Tuesday, Aug. 3, edition of *The Goodland Star-News* incorrectly stated the bids on the replacement office chairs for the treasurer's office. The lowest bid was \$87.50 from Topside Office Supply and the higher bid was \$88.79 from High Plains Office Supply. This was a reporting error.

In the story on Undersheriff Kevin Butts in the July 13, edition of *The Goodland Star-News*, it was incorrectly stated he graduated from Goodland High School in 1984. He quit high school as a junior and went to work full time, and attended night classes at Colby Community College where he received a GED. This is a clarification. When interviewed Butts said he attended Goodland High School and was in the class of 1984.

Father John Spencer who wrote a letter to the editor published in the Tuesday, Aug. 3, edition of *The Goodland Star-News* is the pastor of the St. Francis Episcopal Church in Hopewell, Ill., not St. James. This was an editing error.

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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.

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- 1995 Ford Contour, 4 door, 5 speed, 2.5 liter engine, teal green, 189,614 miles, runs good uses 1 qt. of oil every 3,000 miles, AC has a line leak and radio doesn't work.
- 1970 Ford Pickup, 6 cyl., standard shift, tool box sides
- 1979 Tide Craft 16 ft. boat, Road Runner trailer, motor has dropped one cylinder, trolling motor, live wells and pedestal seats
- Antique furniture, Glassware, (Rosevilli 97-14", Rosevilli 439-6", Hull 102-8", Hull 9 1/2"), other household furniture • Saddles, tack, lawn equipment, crafts, lots of miscellaneous;

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