

Sunflower Electric offers city new agreement

By Tom Betz

The Goodland Star-News
The City Commission decided Monday to take a couple of weeks to read a new contract from Sunflower Electric, the city's main power supplier, which would keep the lights on until the new Goodland Energy Center is ready.

The commission listened to a presentation Monday and had some question, but decided it should delay approval until the next meeting to give the commissioners time to read the agreement.

Bob Johnson, a retired McDonald farmer and vice president of Prairie Land Electric of Norton, a director of the Hays-based "generation and transmission" cooperative, presented the agreement to the commission.

He said the city has had a contract with Sunflower for at least 10 years. "We want to support the new power plant being developed," Johnson said. "We think this agreement will do that. This replaces the contract you have that expires May 31."

The new power agreement is about 5 percent higher than the existing contract, Johnson said.

The existing contract sells the first 4 megawatts of power at \$32,

but Rod Blake, power plant superintendent, said the total cost the city pays is about \$52 per megawatt hour. He said Monday the city is paying Sunflower \$78 per megawatt while the firm's Holcomb plant is down for an overhaul.

City Manager Wayne Hill said the city's cost of generating power is about \$100 per megawatt hour, based on current rates for natural gas. He said the cost under the Goodland Energy Resources contract would be lower at \$47.

Hill said the new agreement should not have a big effect on the city electric rates. He said the city had new electric rates begin in January, but has not seen how those are working. Hill said he does not think there will be a big change, but will review it after it is in place for several months.

Johnson went through the highlights of the new agreement, saying it allows the city to take power from Sunflower, generate it at the city plant or buy it from the Goodland Energy Resources coal-fired power plant and the wind farm planned by ReNewable Energy Resources.

He said the old contract was for interruptible power — which could be cut off by Sunflower when demand was high — but under the new

agreement, the interruptions are under control of the city.

Another change is that Sunflower can call for the city to run its plant and buy power from the city. He said Sunflower will pay the city the fuel cost of generating, which is presently \$4 per megawatt hour.

Any month that Sunflower calls on the city to generate, he said, the co-op will pay a capacity charge of \$2 per kilowatt-month. In the old contract there was no payment to the city for generating when required by Sunflower.

Johnson said the agreement is written with the expectation the city will be buying power from the new coal-fired power plant, but will remain in force as an interconnect, which allows the city to get backup power from Sunflower.

"This is an agreement similar to those we have with other nonmember cities," Johnson said. "All the members of Sunflower Electric are nonprofit, and our motive is to provide low cost electricity."

The co-op operates a coal-fired plant at Holcomb, with at least three more units in the works, and transmission lines across western Kansas. It is owned by six rural electric distribution cooperatives that serve 34 western Kansas counties.

Johnson said there is a separate temporary service agreement to keep the power coming in case it takes too long to get all the required approvals for the new agreement. He said the agreement has to be approved by the Sunflower board and the federal Rural Utilities Service. He said the Kansas Corporation Commission will review it, but that does not have to be done before it becomes effective.

Mayor Rick Billinger asked about the firm paying the city to run the power plant.

"This is new," Johnson said. "We have needed you to run under the old contract, but this is where we will pay you to generate if we need to balance a load or have a gap."

"I don't expect it to happen a lot, but there is pressure on the generation system, and we may need to have some voltage support. When we call, you may have to run for more than one day."

"What if we have power cheaper than you could get?" Billinger asked.

"We will call," Johnson said.

Johnson said with the new agreement, the city should not have to worry about overhauling the engines at the plant. Billinger asked why.

Rod Blake, power plant superintendent, said the interconnect will limit the run times for the existing engines.

Johnson said the city should look at using hydroelectric power from the Western Area Power Administration, which the city has a right to purchase. He suggested putting it in the Kansas Municipal Electric Association power pool.

Johnson said the city has not been able to get the power through the transmission system, but there is a way to draw money to help improve the lines, and provide the city some help for electric improvement projects.

"You get some value out of the power that way," he said. "I highly recommend you look into it."

Asked how often the Holcomb plant is down, Johnson said the operating records show the plant runs 85 percent of the time. He said the overhaul going on now is the biggest outage the plant has ever had, and the biggest overhaul. He said should last six weeks, but it will be like having a new plant when it comes back on line. Johnson said he doesn't expect that to happen again for about 10 years.

City Commissioner Annette Fairbanks asked Blake if he liked the

new agreement.

"Absolutely," Blake said.

City Commissioner Dave Daniels asked who determines what the city charges Sunflower for power.

Blake said the city does. He said the city will document the costs and bill Sunflower.

"Are we going to pay more or not?" Daniels asked.

Johnson said the city's cost will be a little higher than in the past, but it will probably be lower than what the total cost for all the "blended" power is now.

"That will depend on when you have another option next year," he said. "I would guess there is a 5-7.5 percent increase depending on the natural gas cost. The price of gas has dropped by half in the past three months."

Billinger said the city appreciates Sunflower's help over the years, and they will bring the new agreement up at the next meeting.

That will be 5 p.m. on Monday, April 17, in the commission room on the second floor of the City Administration Building at 204 W. 11th. To enter the building, press the button on the wall inside the main doors.

City commission split on summer weed mowing contract

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them," Dechant said.

Garcia seconded the motion. The vote was 3-2 with Daniels, Garcia and Billinger voting yes, and Dechant and Fairbanks voting no.

Jodi Miller, who was at the meeting, said she bid on the contract because she has two sons, Andrew, 16, and Matt, 17, who are advertising for mowing jobs for the summer.

"You have to be 18 to bid," Miller said, "so I would be the supervisor and hire them to do the mowing. I would be responsible for all the insur-

ance and requirements with the city."

Asked what she thought about the possibility the city could change contractors during the summer, Miller said she was not sure they could handle it.

"Chances are my help will be otherwise committed," she said. "I think I disagree with him getting the contract if he is going to mow his own lawns at the city expense. I don't think that is fair as a taxpayer."

Bentzinger, who was not at the meeting, said Wednesday he did not know anything about what went on and had no comment on that.

"I did know they are going to get me a contract in a couple of weeks," Bentzinger said. "Criswell talked to me on Tuesday, but did not say anything about how the decision was reached."

After the mowing contract was approved, Billinger asked Steve Criswell, city code enforcement officer, about the notices they send out to property owners who have not mowed.

"You send out one notice," Billinger said, "and do not sent out another all summer."

Criswell said that is what the city

ordinance says, and it is based on state law.

"You know who is not going to mow and not going to pay," Billinger said. "Why not give others a second notice. Not those we know are not going to mow."

Criswell said the city can't do that.

"We have to be fair with everyone," he said.

Fairbanks asked how a property gets on the mowing list.

Criswell said he drives the city, and after the weeds are over 12 inches tall, the landowner and renter get a letter

saying they have 10 days to mow.

"The letter says this is the only notice they will get," Criswell said. "If they call me, I give them a few extra days."

Daniels said the weed mowing is tied to the property.

"They get a letter and may get it mowed the first time," he said. "Then two weeks later we get a bill."

Billinger suggested taking photos of the places being listed for mowing.

Criswell said the contractor for the past two years would not mow

unless it needed to be done. He said there were a few times when there was a question and he went out to the property measured the weeds and took photos.

"I know most of these are vacant or rental property," Billinger said. "Most people try to keep it looking nice."

Simon reminded the commission the citywide clean up is planned for Saturday morning. Volunteers will gather at the Northwest Kansas Technical College at 8:30 a.m. and will spread out to cover the city and haul stuff to Rasures' lot at 600 Clark.

Horses confiscated in animal cruelty case sold at auction in Colby

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weighed from 600 to 1,270 pounds as they entered the auction ring

Animals to be auctioned were shown in a ring at the center of the building. A scale in the floor of the animal entrance weighed the animals and the weight showed on a display board above the auctioneer's

head. Bidders sat in raised seats around the center.

The sheriff's office ended up with the horses after a man reported hungry and dead horses at the Armknecht farm, 6975 K-27, about five miles north of Goodland.

When Deputy Jason Showalter and Undersheriff Roger Studer went out to investigate on Feb. 28,

they reported finding four dead horses, including a mare and foal, in corrals with 10 others. The others had not been fed for a while by their appearance, the sheriff deputies said.

The horses were taken to Dr. Gary

Smith of Prairieland Veterinary Clinic.

"I was not worried about payment," Smith said, "just wanted the horses back in better health."

He said they had a list of people who wanted to adopt the horses but

the sale had been ordered by the court. People donated feed and money to take care of the horses, but the sale will pay for some of the county's costs.

The Armknechts posted \$5,000 bond and make their next court ap-

pearance on Monday, May 8. They face 14 counts of animal cruelty, a Class A nonperson misdemeanor, and four counts of unlawful disposal of dead animals, an unclassified misdemeanor with a possible fine of \$100 for every 24 hours for each count.

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