

Road decision tabled to Tuesday

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questions and make comments as the commissioners heard from Jerol DeBoer, an engineer and owner from Penco Engineering of Plainville, and Darin Neufeld from the Goodland office of Evans, Bierly, Hutchison and Associates.

Nearly everyone in the audience, it seemed, had come to support Neufeld and urge the commissioners to support the local engineering firm.

City Commissioner Annette Fairbanks summed up for them.

"I think you know most of our thoughts," she said. "This is paid for by the entire county, including the City of Goodland. I think it would be good to keep it local, and hope you take that into consideration."

"I don't think we need to rush into this," Tiede said. "It is not a done deal with the asphalt company that is coming here next year."

Neufeld has pushed to have all the asphalt work done at one time to save money.

"Why do we want to break it up?"

Rasure asked the other commissioners. "We went through the whole process saying it would be a joint project."

"I don't want to rush into this," Tiede repeated.

DeBoer said he was at the meeting to answer questions about Penco Engineering. He said the company has done work in Sherman County for 15 years, including road and bridge projects for the county.

"We do quality projects for a fair price," DeBoer said. "We consider ourselves local, too. We work in 16 counties in northwest Kansas. All the money would stay in northwest Kansas."

Rasure said the county is working together with the city on these projects, and said the city has hired Neufeld's firm for the city jobs. The office has done most of the city's engineering over the last few years, including work at the airport, Pioneer Park and Cherry Street. It is the engineer for downtown intersection projects also.

"Darin (Neufeld) and I would have to work together," DeBoer said, "and I don't see a problem coordinating with him."

"I know Rich Simon, city public works manager, and Curt Way, county public works manager. We work together coordinating things, and don't see any problem there."

Tiede asked DeBoer his recommendation on the county roads.

"I know you cored some, but not recently," Tiede said. "What do you think we are looking at?"

DeBoer said he drove into town

Citizens begin engineer survey drive

By Tom Betz

The Goodland Star-News

Citizens who attended the county commission meeting Tuesday are passing around two "survey" petitions asking people to choose which engineering firm should design the county roads.

"If they want more opinions, we're going to get them," said Andrea Nelson, a housewife who is a friend of Koren Dechant.

Nelson, 226 Sherman, noted that one county commissioner said there were "a lot of people" who supported hiring a Plainville engineering firm to design the county roads instead of using the firm with an office in Goodland.

Nelson said she is carrying two separate surveys asking people to sign whether the support Evans, Bierly, Hutchison and Associates, with an office in Goodland, or Penco Engineering of Plainville.

"There are several people carrying these around town," she said. "We plan to present these to the commissioners at the special meeting at 8 a.m. on Tuesday."

She said people can call her at 899-7172 if they want to sign one of the surveys, or want to collect signatures.

The survey drive began Tuesday afternoon, after commissioners agreed to put off a decision on the engineering contract, and Nelson said they had about 110 people sign the one for Evans, Bierly, but no one had signed one for Penco so far.

"We are asking everyone for their opinion, no matter which engineering firm they support," she said. "The commissioners said they wanted more input and that there were as many people supporting the out-of-town firm. We want to have as many signatures as possible to give them a better picture."

The support effort began after Jona Neufeld, a teacher at West Elementary and wife of Darin Neufeld, who manages the Goodland office, sent out an e-mail asking people to show up or call the county commissioners in support of the local firm.

The e-mail circulated quickly, and Commissioner Mitch Tiede sent a hand written note to Evans, Bierly headquarters in Great Bend.

Fred Wohlcke, vice president of the firm, said Thursday he had seen the note and had talked to Neufeld about it, but had no comment about its content.

The note, faxed along with a copy of Jona Neufeld's e-mail, and said: "Just a note to make you aware of what is going on in Sherman County."

"Myself and another commissioner are very upset at the way this is being handled. This makes everyone look bad. This also makes it very difficult if not impossible to consider EBH for the project. Signed Sherman County Commissioner, Mitch Tiede."

Commissioner Kevin Rasure said he was "surprised and disappointed" that an elected official would complain in such a manner.

on old U.S. 24, and said it looks to be in fairly good shape. He said it needs a mill to remove the top layer and probably an overlay.

The Plainville engineer said if the county does all the projects next year, the maintenance will start a year earlier.

Tiede said they want to wait on Eighth Street until after the energy center is built. DeBoer said Eighth will have to be rebuilt in his opinion, saying the pavement is pretty well shot. He said in some counties they have done a mill and subbase modification on roads like Eighth Street, and let it lay for a year before doing an overlay.

Tiede said that Penco has been doing the county's five-year plan and does the paperwork for county projects.

Rasure asked how Penco does their fees, and if they are based on the hours of work or percentage.

DeBoer said they do an estimate before starting. He said the size of the project has a lot to do with the percentage. The larger the project, the smaller the percentage. He said the company can do lump sum contracts or cost plus a net fee.

"We bill you what it actually cost us?" DeBoer said. "If we set a maximum of \$50,000, and we only use \$40,000, that is what you pay."

"I don't know how we can do it

all in one year," Thomas said. "Would you agree with that?"

DeBoer said he was not sure it could all be done in one year, noting that the County Road 14 concrete project is not scheduled to be bid until three years from now. Because there is a state grant, those plans will have to go through the Department of Transportation.

Rasure asked about doing all the projects when a large asphalt plant is here next year.

DeBoer said with the size of the county projects, "you can bring a contractor in at a good price."

Tiede said if they delayed doing Eighth Street that would be five miles.

"That is quite a project to me," Tiede said.

"Then there is Road 16," Thomas said. "That is another mile."

Tiede said to make Road 16 a good road, the entire mile will have to be worked and rebuilt.

Thomas asked about the railroad crossing, and DeBoer said it would be good to have concrete approaches.

"We've used Penco for all these years, and I think they do us a fine job," Tiede said. "I look at it a bit differently than others because of my work. (He is a grading contractor.)"

"You do all the small jobs through

the years, and I felt like we were cutting them out of the big project. How are they going to treat us in the future? I did not feel it was fair."

Tiede suggested putting the engineering contract up for bid, but both DeBoer and Neufeld said that was probably not a good idea. Someone else would have to be hired to draw up the specifications, they said.

Toward the end of the meeting, Rasure said it was apparent the commissioners were not ready to make decision.

"We will put it on the agenda for a special meeting at 8 a.m. next Tuesday," he said.

"If we can't do a bid process, this is going to be difficult," Tiede said. "Let's get some more input on it."

Rasure brought the debate to a close and said they would take it up again at 8 a.m. on Tuesday. He said they would start the meeting in the commissioner room, but if more people show up they will move it upstairs to the courtroom.

Audience supports local engineer's firm

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the landfill," Thomas asked. "I didn't get a single call, and then was told we rigged it so the local guy got the bid." (Tiede won the bid by about \$200)

"So what? That was last fall," Briney said. "We are here as taxpayers. We want to get the project in for a decent price. We have \$800,000 we would not have had without Darin's pro bono work."

"We are talking about millions of dollars. We need to show up or maybe this is going to be railroad out of the county."

"I don't have a problem with Darin," Tiede said. "I think he can get a fair shot. People are looking at us and saying we are bickering."

"Now you are trying to cram one engineering firm down by throat. I'd like to be able to make an intelligent decision."

"I started this," said Jona Neufeld, a teacher at West Elementary. "My husband had nothing to do with it. I am very upset as a taxpayer...."

"I hear on a daily basis about how our businesses are losing and leaving town. Why would we not try to support everything to keep business here? Why would we send money away from our county? We have an excellent firm here"

"Don't hold against him what I have the initiative to say. I have a right to say this."

"I apologize that you were inconvenienced, but I am not sorry."

Rasure asked Tiede about a note he wrote and faxed to the EBH headquarters in Garden City, saying "Myself and another commissioner are very upset at the way this is being handled. This makes everyone look bad. This also makes it very difficult if not impossible to consider EBH for the project."

Tiede said he wanted the company to know what was going on.

Rasure said he felt it was unprofessional for a commissioner to complain in such a manner, and wanted to know when the

two commissioners made this decision.

John Golden, a former commissioner, said he thought Neufeld's firm was the "top engineering firm," and deserved the support of the community.

"We are going to be wrong no matter what we do," Tiede said.

"Do you want to keep the money in Sherman County?" asked Rod Blake, city power plant superintendent.

"Yes, we do," Tiede said. "There is a group here supporting Darin. We believe there is another group supporting Penco."

"We are being forced into a corner. I am being forced to make a decision."

City Manager Wayne Hill said he felt having more than one firm involved is what got the city into trouble with Steever Water Park, which ended up in a mess and lots of legal fees.

The audience wasn't happy when the decision was put off a week.

"Will you be accepting my calls?" Koren Dechant asked Thomas.

"Only if you are in control," Thomas said. "I don't talk to women who are not in control."

There was a gasp from the women in the room.

"I apologize for saying that," Thomas said.

"I think you have a problem that many of the people who have called you are women," Dechant said. "I am outraged now because you are not coming to a decision and are not listening. I am outraged and letting you know we are not going to stop."

"Where are the people who you say are supporting the outside firm?"

"You have an open meeting," Jack Eklund said, "and I think it is getting out of hand. I don't agree that you are following what everyone wants who voted for you."

"I am doing what I think the people who voted me in want," Tiede said. "There are many people supporting Penco, and they have enough faith that they don't have to be here."

Development council hires director

DIRECTOR, from Page 1a

the necessary feasibility studies, got a new Wallace County website up and running, worked with state tourism efforts and introduced agritourism.

She wrote grant applications for the Weskan and Wallace Fire Departments and the Fort Wallace Museum, updated brochures to promote Wallace County and promoted the county at trade shows. Kirk said

she attended the Tri-State Initiative for Economic Development.

Kirk has been involved in the Wallace County Chamber of Commerce, Bed Tax Committee, Rattlesnake Roundup, Cruisers Car Show, Fort Wallace Rodeo, Memorial Day Celebrations and the Wallace County Fair.

"I think you are getting a dynamite young lady who is so dedicated," said Julie Samuelson, editor and publisher of *The Western*

Times in Sharon Springs "She will do a phenomenal job."

The Sherman County job had been vacant since Applegate left in December 2004. Kay Younger, project coordinator, has been keeping the office open at 1208 Main since she was hired in January 2005.

"My first order of business," Kirk said, "is to get caught up with what has been going on for the past year, set a schedule from there, get it together and go with it."

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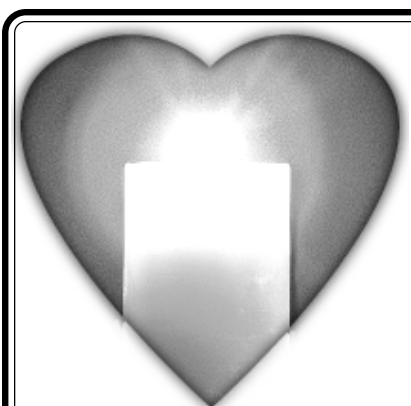
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