

City questions the reliability of federal funds

By ADAM STRUNK
HARVEY COUNTY NOW STAFF

NEWTON—A split vote at the Newton City Commission hinged on belief in the federal government living up to its promises.

The City of Newton reviewed approving a bid for a project at the Newton City/County Airport.

The large-scale project will rebuild Runway 8/26 at the airport, as well as all the electrical and lighting for that runway.

A large amount of the runway work would be paid for by the federal government, as it usually is.

The contract for the work with Dondlinger and Sons will cost \$4.72 million. The county and city would split a \$472,000 10 percent local funding match for the project.

Making up those federal funds for the project is, in part, a \$1.46 million Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Grant. The grant originates out of a law approved by Congress and the Biden Administration in 2021.

Airport Director Brian Palmer said the federal government approached the Newton City/County Airport about providing the funds for the project.

He said he'd been assured recently that the funds would come.

The city, however, does not have those funds in hand.

This made commissioners a bit leery about the financial implications of signing a contract with Dondlinger and then being on the hook financially if the grant dollars never materialized.

Various federal payments, grants and contracts have been canceled or frozen under the current presidential administration.

The city, for instance, recently received a \$15,000 grant to update its historical walking tour. While those funds were allocated by Congress, the U.S. Treasury has not released the funds.

"I'm not comfortable signing any agreements, unless we have grants in hand," Mayor Rich Stinnett said.

After discussion, Commissioner Rod Kreie made a motion to authorize staff to sign on for the work only after the city had all the promised money in hand.

He received a second, and the commission was set to vote on the motion.

Palmer then noted that the Dondlinger bid was only valid for one more day.

He said city staff had pushed back the vote on signing the contract as far as possible, hoping to get confirmation on the dollars being available.

Palmer said that the bid price might go up after its expiration.

Commissioners asked City Attorney Chris Towle to weigh in on what the city's risk was in

moving forward with the contract signing.

Koehn asked if the city could find wording or a provision to insulate itself, should it sign the contract and the funding fall through.

"Is there any wording we can put in place so Dondlinger can't come back in a lawsuit?" he asked.

Towle said the city could ask Dondlinger if it would extend its bid price out in the future.

He also said the city should be protected in halting the project if the funding falls through.

"Anyone who contracts with a municipality is taking that risk," he said.

Palmer held that the funds would come.

"They have assured us those grants would be out in the next few weeks," he said.

The commission voted 3-1 to move ahead with the contract with Dondlinger and Sons.

Stinnett voted against it.

"I'm just not comfortable with it," he said after his nay vote.

In other news, the city voted to publish a notice of its intent to exceed its revenue-neutral rate.

The revenue-neutral rate represents the number it would have to set its property tax rate at to not exceed the amount of revenue it took in the year prior.

The city would have had to lower its tax rate by 3.403 to

remain revenue-neutral.

Instead, the city is shooting to set 72.223 mills, the same amount as last year.

Keeping the mill levy the same will result in the city taking in an additional \$610,413 of property tax revenue.

That represents a 4.95 increase in property tax revenues levied by the city.

The commission also directed \$20,000 in funding to the Newton Senior Center via the city's economic development fund.

The senior center asked for \$20,000, and the city previously budgeted to fund the senior center for \$5,000.

The city had funded the senior center from 2017 to 2021, when it stopped.

City Manager Daniela Rivas asked if the stop in funding was COVID-related.

Kreie said it had to do with the commission not being able to trust the numbers provided to it at the time.

He said that's since changed.

"They're doing a lot better. I'm impressed with what they've been doing," he said.

The commission approved the senior center's complete funding request.

The commission also approved granting back \$20,000 in tax revenue to an industrial filter manufacturer.

The company, Olympus Filters, has made an \$875,000 capital investment and plans to hire

seven employees over a 10-year period, according to Harvey County Economic Development Director Beth Shelton.

She said the company planned on buying a spec building, but with one not available, it is instead leasing a property.

The operation is located at 1810 SE 9th Street. Since the company doesn't own the property, it is unable to offer industrial revenue bonds and tax abatements. The city, instead, will grant each year a value equal to the property's tax value, in a total amount of up to \$20,000.

The annual grant is subject to the company remaining in operation in Newton.

Finally, Mike Fellows gave an update to the city commission about the 2025 Harvey County Constitution Contest, which he organizes.

High school seniors respond to an essay question relating to the U.S. Constitution. The contest begins on Sept. 17 and ends with an awards ceremony on Oct. 29. First prize wins \$750.

This year, four high schools are participating, including Newton, Halstead, Sedgwick and Burrton.

Fellows said he reached out repeatedly to the Hesston School District but did not receive a response.

Outside of individual prizes, the winning school also gets a traveling trophy.

DILLONS

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spent several years on the process of creating a con-

tract and agreement with the railroad to pay for the clean up.

The city has discussed razing the now vacant building since it pur-

chased the property for \$475,000 in 2015.

The city-owned site has drawn complaints from residents as it continues to dilapidate.

It also figures into city revitalization plans once torn down.

Ideas for the property over the years have included green space, additional

parking, as well as an anchor draw or restaurant for the city's downtown.

Commissioners Kreie, Leroy Koehn, Melanie Watson and Mayor Rich

Stinnett voted in favor of putting out the RFP for the demolition. Commissioner Kathy Valentine was not present due to an illness.

NEWTON POLICE ACTIVITY LOGS

June 29 Arrests: ●Derrick Duncan, 39, Newton, driving with suspended license, 1500 Blk Old Main St	30, Clearwater, failure to appear, 100 Blk W Elm St ●Kenneth Herrod, 31, Newton, criminal threat, 1200 Blk N Main St Criminal calls: ●Fraud, 1600 Blk E Eighth St	●Tyler Hutson, 31, Newton, criminal damage to property, 1700 Blk E 11th St ●Jason Fike, 49, Wichita, driving with invalid license, 100 Blk E Broadway St Criminal calls: ●Domestic abuse, 600 Blk Old Main St ●Criminal trespass, 600 Blk Boyd Ave	Arrests: ●Thomas Bishop, 40, Newton, criminal damage to property, 400 Blk E Ninth St ●Bethany Howard, 30, Newton, domestic battery, 00 Blk Friendship Ln ●Cortez Jones, 25, Wichita, criminal damage to property, 00 Blk Friendship Ln Criminal calls: ●Criminal damage, 200 Blk E Ninth St	●Motor vehicle theft, 200 Blk W Second St	Newton, aggravated burglary, 100 Blk SW 12th St ●Joe Salas, 39, failure to appear, 100 Blk E First St ●Jessica Dehaven, 29, Newton, aggravated burglary, 100 Blk SW 13th St ●Tiam Douglas, 32, Newton, battery, 1000 Blk N Boyd Ave
June 30 Criminal calls: ●Stolen property, 600 Blk Quail Creek Ave	July 2 Arrests: ●Engram Tailon, 23, Newton, failure to appear, possession of marijuana, 100 Blk W Broadway St	July 3		July 4 Arrests: ●Terry Haynes, 65, Newton, possession of narcotic, 300 Blk E Seventh St ●Carmen Groff, 29, Newton, criminal threat, 300 Blk Muse St	
July 1 Arrests: ●Keegan Dougherty,			July 5 Arrests: ●Paige Dodson, 25,	July 6 Criminal calls: ●Drug violation, marijuana, 1200 Blk E First St	

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7.19.25
BETHEL COLLEGE
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Medicaid Planning

Personal Injury

Trust Administration

Estate Planning

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"We were very
pleased with the
process and outcome.
Thank you for going
the extra mile."