

Get to Know Your City Council Members: Holly Meins

By Zach Wetzel
For The Plain Talk

Members of the Vermillion city council work tirelessly to help make Vermillion a great place to live, and Holly Meins plays an important role as a member of the council.

Meins, a graduate of USD, is a Senior Health Informativist at Avera McKennan. She is very enthusiastic about her service opportunities with the council.

According to Meins, the council is responsible for making decisions regarding any ordinances that come in front of them.

"People give us all of the information and we make our decisions based on

what's presented to us," said Meins.

The council also helps out with the budget. Meins explained that the council looks over the budget during its meetings.

According to Meins, the council meets every other Monday.

"Information is presented to us so we know what we're going over in the actual meeting on Monday night," said Meins.

The only time the council meets is on Mondays, or for any other special occasions. Meins described the Monday afternoon meeting as an information session.

Sometimes the Monday informational meetings will

feature a presenter.

According to Meins, the council went to look at a liquor store during one of the Monday meetings.

"On Monday night we cover everything, take votes, and make our decisions," Meins said.

Meins explained that the council talks about and works on the budget.

The council also responds to different requests from different businesses. According to Meins, the council works with many of the local businesses during Dakota Days.



"We make decisions about requests to have alcohol outside or block off streets," Meins said.

The council reviews countless ordinances, many of which have an effect on D-Days, Meins explained.

"I think we do a good job of controlling D-days," Meins observed. "I think it's been pretty calm the last few years."

Meins' mother Clarene has been on the council for six years, according to Meins. Meins explained that she and her mother both work together representing the northeast

ward. Meins enjoys being a member of the city council.

"It's something completely different than what I do day-to-day and I've done in Vermillion all my life," Meins said. "The council is really interesting and something that I've never been part of. It's such a really good learning experience for me."

Meins, whose kids are more mature and independent, explained that she wanted to use her extra time to try something new by being on the council.

According to Meins, if someone wants to be on the council, the process is to get enough signatures on the required petition and

the required percentage of voters in their ward.

Meins described Vermillion as a nice community that is great for raising families, and observed that there have been many positive changes over the years.

Meins believes that the city council is here to serve the community.

"It's not about what I think, but about what the general community thinks is best," Meins said.

In addition to her service as a city council member, Meins also works ticket sales at USD. In her spare time, Meins enjoys spending time with her kids and attending their sports activities.

City council talks about trial run, bond levy, other items

By Alan Dale
The Plain Talk

City engineer Jose Dominguez announced the night of Dec. 15 at the City of Vermillion council meeting that the 'trial run' for the intersection at Main and Center and Court streets is a go, but the start is still not determined.

Dominguez confirmed that the trial run which would eliminate lights running east-west and put in stop signs on Center and Court streets would be a three-month period.

He added that the beginning of the trial would commence either during the final week of December of the first week of January.

In other items:

The council unanimously approved of the resolution authorizing issuance of General Obligation Bonds, Series 2015.

The resolution authorizes the sale of up to \$3.1 million in bonds at an interest rate to not exceed 4.5 percent. It also authorizes Mayer Jack Powell, the City Finance Officer and City Attorney to execute the necessary documents for the assurance of the bonds, account for the use of the funds and requires an ordinance for the collection of funds for the repayment.

The council unanimously approved of the first reading of Ordinance No. 1324 creating a bond fund and levying taxes for the payment of General Obligation Bonds, Series 2015. This goes hand-in-hand with the above resolution and aids in

creating a bond fund and levying of taxes for the payment of the General Obligation Bonds, Series 2015.

The ordinance provided for the certification of a 105 percent of the annual debt service to the county auditor as to the annual tax levy. The 105 percent tax levy is based upon some taxes not being collected each year so there are enough funds for the annual debt service.

If the council appropriates funds for the payment of the general obligation bonds, the tax levy for the payment can be reduced or cancelled.

The council unanimously approved of the proposed electric rate increase to keep pace with increased energy purchasing costs in 2015.

The proposed electric rate increase would allow the city to collect the necessary revenue to meet increased purchased power costs. For a residential electric customer using 1,000 kwh per month, this increase translates into approximately \$2.10 per month according to Vermillion City Manager John Prescott.

The council unanimously approved the adoption of a resolution amending the assessment roll for sidewalk repairs to show the adjustment to the final cost due to the miscalculation in quantities and the removal of the properties that fall under the sidewalk safety improvement assessment.

State statute requires a public hearing to be held to consider the assessment roll.

The council unanimously approved the assessment roll for the construction of concrete surfacing along the north to south alley in Block 68, Bigelow's Addition from East Clark Street to East Cedar Street.

The construction cost was \$43,442.11 with \$38,532.03 being assessable.

However, Vermillion resident Lori Whitman spoke to the council and voiced her displeasure with the contractors who worked along those streets.

"My concern is that a contractor had been paid for a job that when they came through and paved my alley a lot of rock was taken and my cable was disconnected," Whitman said. "So I have a temporary cable running out of my house under the concrete and there is still a pile of rock and dirt there."

Mayor Jack Powell assured Whitman that her issues would be addressed as soon as possible and Dominguez also confirmed that the problem has already been discussed with the contractor.

"I am paying taxes on something where my property was destroyed," Whitman said.

The council unanimously approved of the second reading of Ordinance 1323 Supplemental Appropriations Ordinance for 2014.

As it is second reading of an ordinance, a roll call vote is needed.

The general fund reserve will be reduced \$6,000 from what was planned when the budget

was first adopted. The General Fund reserve balance projected for year-end will now stand at \$1,485,233.

The council unanimously approved of the final plat submitted on behalf of owner Ms. Victoria Winteringham on a property located on Noble Street.

The council unanimously approved the recommendation to review the information on the commercial collection license applications to determine if the licenses should be renewed for 2015.

The council unanimously approved the recommendation reappointing Bruce Plate to the Public Safety Center Board with a term expiring December 31, 2017.

The council unanimously approved of the fee schedule for activities that the City is involved with among the different departments.

The council unanimously approved allowing the Mayor Powell to sign the Pre-Application Checklist so that the City can start the application process to reconstruct the apron at the Harold Davidson Field Airport.

The design is estimated to cost \$40,000, but the city would initially pay for the entire cost with 94 percent being refunded after the project is completed.

This would put the city's total cost toward the project at \$2,400.

The council unanimously approved approving the Resolution to set a hearing date of January 19, 2015 for the

special assessments roll for street lighting improvements on North Norbeck Street, from Roosevelt Street to East Cherry Street.

The construction cost was \$14,010.45 with an assessable value at 8 percent making the total, \$15,131.31.

The council unanimously approved the Resolution to set a hearing date of January 19, 2015 for the amended special assessment roll for the sidewalk repairs.

The construction costs to be assessed are \$61,609.04 with an assessable value that does not include an administrative fee which is either \$50 or 8 percent of the construction cost, whichever is greater.

The council unanimously approved the Resolution to set a hearing date of January 19, 2015 for the special assessments for the sidewalk safety improvements.

The construction cost was \$13,009.56 all of which is assessable. The assessable value does not include the administrative fee, which is either \$50 or 8 percent, whichever is greater.

The council unanimously approved of the Resolution encouraging the South Dakota Legislature to consider and support a measure which would allow local voters the option to approve a penny sales tax for particular projects.

One penny of a general local sales tax is currently estimated to provide about \$1.6M in receipts a year according to Prescott.

WHEEL

From Page 1A

few months.

"Road maintenance is always a funding issue," Mockler said. "We are repairing roads every year, but you can only patch a patch for so long before you need to replace the road altogether. As a County, we divide the money in many different directions. In doing so, we hope that we are bettering Clay County and the communities of our county at the end of the day."

"Now, if we don't have a wheel tax in place, it will become even harder to meet the County's growing needs if we lose out on future tax revenue increases from the State. Is the wheel tax perfect? No. But nothing is. Right now it's our most viable option for additional funding."

The problem is that with the deterioration of roads, that could lead to less than pleasing view to the eye and that in itself could cause serious issues for the quality of life in the area.

"If we are not able to keep up with repairs or replacing roads and bridges in a timely manner, then quality of life becomes an issue when our emergency services can't respond in a timely manner," Mockler said.

"We are working extremely hard to make Vermillion and Clay County to be recognized and known as a destination and providing a higher quality of life," Packard said. "Our current roads and bridges do not portray this quality of life."

With dilapidated roads, a potential increase in

vehicle damage in the area, and other issues that arise with the inability to fix the roads, the county could see even more issues according to Powell.

"If it is voted down again then roads and bridges will not be rebuilt," Powell said. "The state has no intention of giving us money we should have been paying by way of the authority the legislature gave us. If you refuse to pay to maintain you home, farm, vehicles and equipment it will catch up and open your eyes. Any business that does not improve its operation and maintenance is most likely going to fail."

"Run down roads and bridges will drag down our economy, create excessive vehicle repairs and create a very unsafe transportation system."

So how bad could the roads get?

"The worst case scenario for our roads and bridges would be closing them or turning them back to gravel to avoid safety issues," Mockler said about the potential freefall the road construction issues could delve into if the wheel tax is indeed voted out.

Packard says that the county's ability to keep up with the need for maintenance has clearly fallen behind. Now it's an

issue if they can put a dent in that deficit or if it becomes too far gone.

"Clay County is already behind on road repair and the roads continue to deteriorate and the cost of repair continues to escalate," Packard said. "The current county funds allow for emergency repair and a band-aid approach to road repair and even worse the closure of bridges due to safety issues."

"There is an old New England joke that ends with a punch line of 'You can't get there from here.' The longer we go at the present funds the roads and bridges will get further behind."

Powell sees the long and the short of it and now the onus is on Clay County citizens to make sure that its roads improve or face the consequences.

"There are two situations we face today," Powell said. "If we fail to approve the wheel tax our roads will become worse or we stop funding many programs mandated to the county. If the legislature follows through on their proposed legislation Clay County will not receive new funds and we have already seen how poorly that is working."

But what about the state making the wheel tax an "or else" proposition?

To some it feels like that the state telling counties if they do not pass a wheel tax those who vote it down would ultimately be punished for doing so.

Packard disagrees with that notion.

"Actually I feel Clay County needs the funds it would receive from a wheel tax in order to begin a serious attention to road repair no matter what the state does," she said. "If we want good roads and to be able get there from here as well as have our region improve and grow, a health and safe infrastructure is imperative. Sixteen dollars per year is pretty inexpensive way to begin to achieve a healthier and safer county."

But it also appears to some citizens who have attended county board meetings and the commissioners themselves that this enforcement of a wheel tax is the state's way of washing its hands of being the people responsible for imposing more expenses on South Dakotans.

"Yes and no, each county

has different needs," Packard said. "Some have little to no bridges and minimal road responsibility. Clay County has over 75 bridges and (many) miles of County and township roads. For a small county we have the state's flag ship University (University of South Dakota), the National Music Museum, and Missouri River National Water Way and we should have roads that portray the importance and dignity of Clay County and not ones that pop tires and contribute to windshield repair."

Powell doesn't see the state as doing anything other than what it needs to

do and now its Clay County's turn.

"It is not blackmail to tell someone to fulfill your responsibilities," Powell said. "I would rather they mandate but the state likes to have local government govern local issues. The state, with the help of the Transportation Study group are trying to help us. We need to do our share also."

"The state has been too conservative and we are paying for it. The people in Clay County have been too conservative and now our roads show it."

"You get what you pay for. If you don't pay for it and are an individual you lose."

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