

## City scraps soccer fields as deadline nears

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

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After months of debate and deliberation regarding the Great Outdoors Colorado grant for the Holyoke baseball field complex, Holyoke City Council members are close to finalizing their newest proposal that will be submitted Aug. 28.

During their Tuesday, Aug. 6 meeting, council members reviewed the results from the public survey about what improvements should be made to the baseball field complex.

While the idea of constructing soccer fields had been thrown around at previous meetings as a possible way to encourage recreation, with 80 percent of those taking the survey voting that there is no need to develop such fields, it was determined that soccer fields would be left off the grant request.

The council decided the grant request would include, in order of importance determined by the survey, the construction of two ADA restrooms, awnings for the bleachers, safer playground equipment, construction of ADA-compliant dugouts and an extension of the bike path located southeast of the ball park.

While the restrooms and awnings were deemed the most important by those who took the survey, council members discussed the importance of encouraging activity.

“Our downfall last time we submitted was the recreation side of it. Awnings and bathrooms do not encourage recreation, but the bike path does,” City Superintendent Mark Brown said.

Council members then turned their focus to the percentage of the improvements they would be matching GOCO. At a 45 percent match, the City of Holyoke would be responsible for contributing roughly \$96,000 of the estimated \$213,329 total cost of the project.

Donations and gifts will cover nearly \$38,000 of the \$96,000 the city must pay.

City Clerk/Treasurer Kathy Olofson mentioned that the city’s willingness to match at 45 percent should show GOCO that Holyoke is willing to cooperate and put money toward the project as well.

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### **City moves forward with MEAN**

Andrew Ross from the Municipal Energy Agency of Nebraska was on hand at last week's meeting to inform council members that Holyoke's contract is coming due at the end of September, an opportunistic time for the community to optimize the market, according to Ross.

Ross stated several times throughout his presentation that Holyoke had benefited greatly with some of the lowest electric rates in the region during their current contract. From 2003-2013, Holyoke was paying a 2 percent escalator each year through MEAN, which supplies half of the power to Holyoke, the other half coming from the Western Area Power Administration.

"Holyoke's rates have been very low—some of the lowest wholesale supply in the region, in the world, to be honest," Ross said.

Instead of another long-term plan, council members decided to opt for a five-year plan, as Ross said it will save the city quite a bit of money. The new plan will be a 6 percent escalator for five years.

"If you go 10 years, that's a 60 percent increase in the next 10 years," said Brown of the city's decision. "If you had a crystal ball and could tell me what the rates are going to do, you may be way behind the eight ball, you may be way ahead of the eight ball, but I am not willing to stick my neck out that far."

### **Issues at the library addressed**

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Jean Clayton attended the meeting on behalf of the library board to bring the council's attention to grounds maintenance issues at Heginbotham Library. The main concerns she had were that the sprinkler system currently does not hit all parts of the yard, forcing the librarian to manually water the dry spots, and that there is an overgrowth of weeds on the property.

Clayton stated that these issues occur almost every year and that she wishes the library would not be at the bottom of the priority list.

Council member Scott Murray stated that these issues could be eradicated with a phone call before the problems get out of hand. Clayton questioned why a phone call was necessary for the city to take care of property owned by the city.

Clayton and members of the board agreed that there has been a failure in communication between the two parties and that both sides will open up lines of communication and work together to solve potential issues.

### **Officials report**

Brown reported that there have been three power outages since the last council meeting. The first one occurred Friday, July 19 on Phillips County Road 41 as the power to the cemetery well was lost due to a goose.

At L&L Ready Mix, power was lost on Monday, July 22, and the last one was Friday, July 26 in the 500 blocks of Coleman and Reynolds avenues due to a bad transformer that has since been replaced.

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Brown also noted that the new siren for the fairgrounds has arrived and will be placed soon.

Preliminary plans for the mini park project on the southeast corner by the stoplight were explained by Brown. The new plan would remove the current gazebo and trees and replace with an overhang extending from the north side of Scheunemann's Department Store.

The sidewalk will be replaced, creating two gathering areas on each side of the raised portion of the concrete slab. Stone pillars will be put in place and steel fencing will be added under the overhang.

Police Chief Doug Bergstrom reported that between July 11-31 the Holyoke Police Department generated 91 calls for service, wrote four reports, gave out four citations and issued 16 warnings.

### **Other business**

In other business Aug. 6, the council:

—accepted a letter of agreement from the Phillips County Clerk for the Nov. 5 coordinated election.

—appointed J.C. Peckham as CML Policy Committee representative.

—approved Mayor Orville Tonsing to sign the State Historical Fund contract for a \$35,000 grant to do brick repair work on the Heginbotham Library building and fence.

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—unanimously decided not to accept Waste Management’s proposal for a city-wide recycling program.

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