

Dawson County considers public transit merger

Written by Deb Egenberger

Friday, 18 January 2013 15:38 -

Commissioners reorganize for 2013

Dawson County commissioners reorganized for the 2013 year during their meeting Monday, electing former board vice chairman P.J. Jacobson of Cozad as chairman and Bill Stewart of Lexington as vice chair.

The board also made its annual appointments to county offices—keeping all current employees in place—and Jacobson assigned commissioners to various committees.

County depositories were selected and include all banks in Dawson County.

The Times will continue to publish commissioner proceedings for the coming year, as will the Tri-City Tribune.

The Lexington Clipper Herald will publish all legal notices. Legal will also be available on the county website dawsoncountynz.org.

The board approved 12 courthouse holidays as well.

LEXINGTON—With expertise in public transportation across six central Nebraska counties and years of experience dealing with federal funding, officials from RYDE Transit and Mid-Nebraska Community Foundation believe a merger with Dawson County’s handi-bus system could provide more efficient service to county residents.

Dawson County commissioners heard a presentation by Reach Your Destination Easily (RYDE) Transit during their regular bimonthly meeting Tuesday morning.

RYDE, based in Kearney, covers approximately 3,600 square miles or a population of roughly 100,000 people in Adams, Buffalo, Franklin, Gosper, Hamilton and Kearney counties.

RYDE buses travel an average of 34,000 miles a year with 130,000 boardings annually, according to Charles McGraw, RYDE’s transportation director .

The system works similarly to Dawson County’s public transit in that customers of all ages can request rides 24 hours in advance to and from work, medical appointments, shopping or social events.

County commissioners have been considering consolidating services with RYDE for about a year with the intention of offering same or better services at a reduced cost.

“We think we can do a fairly decent job of running your system,” said Ed Butler, business manager for Mid-Nebraska Community Services, which administers RYDE.

The county’s buses, equipment and building would be leased to the RYDE system for a low fee.

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In return, RYDE would handle all of the paperwork, billing, scheduling and employment.

All county transit employees who choose to transfer would be accepted, Butler said.

County officials hope cities would come on board in the cooperative effort.

The next step in the consideration process will be a public hearing scheduled for 9 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 15.

In other action, commissioners approved a purchase agreement for the old Sixth Street grocery store building owned by Community Economic Development.

The county will pay \$600,000 for the building and will maintain terms of a \$98,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture grant previously awarded.

Lexington commissioner Bill Stewart said Lutheran Family Services and a parts supply company that services Tyson will remain in the building.

The county currently rents space for offices that could move to the new acquisition and stored items from the old jail building will be transferred to the climate-controlled area.

Closing is set for March.

In other business, the county board:

heard the monthly and annual crime report from sheriff Gary Reiber. Total services were down

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slightly for the month of December with 2012 calls to dispatch at 17,614 and total services at 11,026.

discussed the possibility of offering a prescription drug discount card endorsed by the National Association of County Officials that would be no cost to Dawson County but make discounts available to any county resident on prescriptions not covered by insurance. Commissioners want more information before making the required five-year commitment.

authorized an agreement between the county and state for survey services on Highway 47 north of Gothenburg for locating and replacing section corner markers when the state resurfaces the road later this year.

learned two global information system websites containing county information have been opened to the public. Links to extended map layers and parcel/soil information sites are available on the assessor's page of the county website, dawsoncountyne.org.