

Pros, cons of two sites

still being considered

By Jan Schultz
The Imperial Republican

Council members continue to look at the pros and cons of two sites being considered for a future Imperial Volunteer Fire Department (IVFD) fire hall.

That for certain will mean a later bond issue vote before city residents, either late summer or at November's General Election.

Approval of a fire hall site was on Monday's meeting agenda, but council members decided to look a little closer at the Wellington football field property once again.

Monday's decision came after giving direction to the IVFD to center their plans on the Broadway location after failing to pass motions to buy the Wellington site from Chase County Schools two weeks ago.

A 4-0 vote Monday authorized a survey at the Wellington site evaluating elevations and drainage issues should a fire hall be built there. It will also look at the needs for relocating the soccer field to the field's south end.

"I keep going round and round on this, I don't know how many times I've thought about it. I'm still not sold on the Broadway site," said council member Chad Yaw.

Council member John Arterburn agreed, as did the other two council members.

"I said the other night I didn't think it was the right place, but I've been hammered so hard on it," Arterburn said.

"My thought is, we're not in the right spot not just for the fire department expansion but for the downtown expansion," he said.

Arterburn noted the recent closing of an Imperial restaurant, and that possibly someone would choose to site a restaurant at the Broadway location, north of the library.

However, Mayor Dwight Coleman wondered about that feasibility, noting the lack of parking, especially truck parking.

Yaw said, as they look at the situation, Imperial is going to go one of two ways.

"Imperial is either going to dry up or grow to stay alive," Yaw said.

Both Yaw and Arterburn said that the Broadway site is not a "free" lot as has been referenced, noting that taxpayers paid for its purchase and to have the old school torn down there, which created the now empty space. It could also be sold to others for retail development, Arterburn said.

Coleman said it's hard to go against what the majority of the fire department wants—to build at the Broadway site.

"But, we are also charged with the future of Imperial and that's what we have to look at," Coleman said.

On the other hand, the mayor said he recalled that there was “all kinds of room” at the current hall when EMS built its own building and moved out, “and now we’re full again.”

Fire Chief Nick Schultz noted when the ambulances were there, the dive trailer was being stored off site. And since then, the rural board has purchased a new military-type water tanker and quick attack unit, and trucks are bigger.

J. R. Reeder and Dan Thompson both felt more study is needed, as well.

Reeder said he believes the council has said in years past they would build the fire hall where they could and where it would be best.

Thompson added there are still questions and not enough answers on the pros and cons at both locations.

The delay wasn't welcomed by IVFD member Brad Dillan.

“So now you are reconsidering after you told us we could put it on Broadway?” Dillan asked.

Dillan said he knew the council was trying to make the best decision, but it has been frustrating.

“It's been frustrating it's not going anywhere, from our point of view,” he said.

Due to time issue constraints, this further study on a site location will prevent a bond issue vote at the May 13 Primary Election, as the IVFD had hoped.

City Attorney Josh Wendell said, during even years, state statutes allow for a special election only during July and August if not at the Primary or General Elections.

It has also been learned that a petition drive will need to be conducted and a resolution passed, placing the bond issue for a fire hall on the ballot.

In a related matter, the council hopes to schedule a joint meeting with the rural fire board to review the 1991 agreement between the two entities that spells out responsibilities of both groups for fire protection.

Other council business

- Salaries for two new police officers were approved. Chad Ostemeyer of Osceola and Kelly Pearson of Stockton, Kan., will start work on Monday, Feb. 10, at annual salaries of \$32,500. Police Chief Ryan Wisnieski noted their employment contracts include a section that requires a prorated payback of training costs if they work for the Imperial Police Department less than 36 months. Both men will be moving here this weekend.

- A new sewer camera approved for purchase on a 4-0 vote will allow the sanitation department to gather video evidence of problems in main lines. Public Works Supt. Pat Davison said it will greatly improve their determination of what is causing clogs in the city's large mains. Now, city workers can only guess what is causing problems from what they can pull out of the lines with rakes, Davison said. The camera will not be used for private sanitation lines due to its size, he said. The \$14,022 Envirosight Jetscan Camera will be purchased from Nebraska Environmental Products in Lincoln.

- Imperial's Planning Commission will now operate with seven members instead of nine with approval of a resolution Monday. The resolution also spells out the terms of the current members so they are staggered. The Planning Commission sought the change to lower numbers because of difficulty in reaching a quorum at their meetings. Current members and the years their terms end are Kelen Fortkamp (2014), Nick Schultz (2014), Jason Anderson (2014), Doug Carman (2015), Stewart Weiss (2015), Randy Roesener (2015) and Ben Sauder (2016).

- The council's next regular meeting Feb. 17 falls on President's Day, a holiday observed by the city of Imperial. They rescheduled that meeting to Wednesday, Feb. 19, but if no major business items arise, it may be cancelled.

- A new health insurance plan is being looked at for Imperial Manor and Parkview/Heights employees. Now, employees are offered two plans, with half of the premium costs paid by the Manor and half by the employee whether they have a single or family policy. However, Administrator Melissa Larson indicated they will likely be looking at only offering the single plan to all employees, but increasing how much of the premium is paid by the Manor. She will research additional options for the council to review.

- No action was taken, but more information will be gathered by Community Development Director Jason Tuller on details of a Downtown Revitalization Grant application. He said he'd

like to focus on some of the east-west blocks along Broadway for beautification efforts in the grant application. First phase of that process would require a \$7,500 local match for a possible \$30,000 grant to create the revitalization plan.