

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Although the school board voted 5-4 to comply with a lower height requirement on one of the football field light poles, it didn't come without a lot of questions and uncertainty.

In a straw poll at a July 14 meeting, board members narrowly gave Supt. Matt Fisher direction to proceed with placement of a lower, 41-foot northeast pole instead of seeking a variance board hearing to erect the pole at 52 feet.

However, Supt. Matt Fisher said, when queried by board member Gregg Smith, if he was going to make a recommendation, "I'd recommend that we pursue the variance.

"I really think that from everything I see in terms of the process, I don't see any basis for them not granting the variance," Fisher said.

"That doesn't necessarily mean that they would, but I don't see any basis" for them not to, he added.

Fisher said the school has invested the time and money in putting a variance proposal together, "and if it takes us an extra month to get through the process, we certainly have spent plenty of time on it already."

Board members approved a bill of \$801.10 at last week's meeting for the legal work preparing for a possible variance hearing.

Having the additional height will improve the lighting on the field, Fisher continued, but he said his biggest concern is how much light will be shining in the eyes of the spectators.

Fisher said he would love to see the football team play their first game on Sept. 4 at the new field, "but if it takes another month to get it better, I think it's worth the time" to go through the variance process.

However, the board's straw poll took the other direction.

Board members reiterated their dismay last week that they were being held to a higher standard than others in the community.

As an example, Fisher noted that the newer Ford New Holland sign erected the past year on Highway 61 also penetrates the airport 50-1 zoning by 12 feet, based on a survey taken by the school.

He said the FAA rules state that if a sign is constructed or altered, paperwork with the FAA must be filed.

"They've never vigorously enforced the 50-1 zoning," Fisher said of the zoning board.

While Fisher said it hadn't been done, a check with the city found that New Holland did file the application for the sign, and the FAA ruled it "posed no hazard to air navigation." The state review has also been completed with no objections.

The FAA paperwork was filed after the New Holland sign was up. City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland said the city received word last week on the federal and state reviews.

City Building Inspector/Zoning Officer Nick Schultz said the New Holland sign is slightly lower than the previous one and actually sets back further west a foot or two.

He said New Holland had three different sign companies involved in placing of the new sign, and the local store was not involved. All of the plans for the sign were done through the corporate headquarters, he said.

The sign company that actually ended up erecting it thought the building permit had been acquired by the previous sign company that had contracted for the job.

At a Feb. 26 Imperial board of adjustment (variance board) hearing, approval was given for the new sign contingent on New Holland filing the FAA form.

School board members noted, as well, last week that there are multiple other penetrations to the 50-1 zoning near the airport.

Airport zoning board members have contended those were all grandfathered in at the time the runway was extended.

Fisher concluded his comments after the light pole discussion last week, saying he'll sleep better once the decision on seeking a variance or not had been made.

The three other poles at the football field have been issued building permits at heights of 70 feet on the southwest, 52 feet on the southeast and 62 feet on the northwest.

A building permit was issued for the northeast pole, as well, at 41 feet, contingent on approval from the airport zoning board.

The school has resubmitted FAA paperwork last week for that pole at 41 feet, according to school office staff.

After the FAA rules, it then goes through the state review. Then, the airport zoning board will meet to rule on the pole's placement.