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City moves closer to awarding bid

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

The Maquoketa City Council can award the contract for the clean-up of the downtown fire debris to the lowest bidder once all the paperwork is in place, the council was told this week.

City Manager Brian Wagner gave the council an updated report on the status of the long-awaited project Monday night, Feb. 1.

Wagner told the council last month that he expected the project engineer to recommend that the council award the contract to the second lowest bidder because the lowest bidder did not include all of the required paperwork attachments with its bid.

But the city manager told the council on Monday night that he posed the question to Bill Blum of Dubuque, who is interim city attorney.

Wagner said Blum replied that he didn't see the missing attachments to the lowest bid as a "major irregularity. He thought it was a correctable one. So if the city wanted to take that bid, you could."

G&B Construction of Burlington submitted the apparent low bid, \$341,000, to clear away the debris and demolish and remove the building at 147 S. Main St., the northeast corner of Pleasant and South Main streets from the January 2008 downtown fire that leveled four other buildings containing three businesses.

The Maquoketa Industrial Development Assistance Service, the economic development financing arm of the city, owns the corner building and will pay that portion of the clean-up cost.

Questions were raised about that bid because it did not include all of the attachments. The second-lowest bidder of the five bids received by the Jan. 14 deadline was \$376,154 from Lester Construction of Rock Island, Ill.

That bid, which included all the required attachments, is \$35,154 above the G&B Construction bid.

Wagner said Blum also told him that because the downtown area is a designated urban renewal area, under state law the council essentially could award the contract to any of the five bidders. "So it looks like it's pretty open to however you want to interpret the bid results," Wagner said.

Although city officials opened bids for the demolition nearly three weeks ago, the city is still awaiting final paperwork to be completed to allow awarding of a contract.

The paperwork in question was still in the hands of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as of last week. Wagner told the council that the project officer for the clean-up project told him in a message sent late Friday, Jan. 29, that the two documents in question would be sent out on Tuesday, Feb. 2.

Wagner said signatures of two EPA officials are needed on the cover page of the city's downtown clean-up plan.

In addition, an agreement between the EPA and the State Historic Preservation Office regarding the salvage of some ornate columns from the pile of rubble had to be completed.

The Jackson County Historical Society has requested that the metal columns that were in the Sue's Hallmark building be salvaged. That building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The EPA was to complete a draft agreement and forward it to the State Historic Preservation Office for its approval.

Wagner noted that the Historic Preservation Office can take up to 30 days to review the agreement.

Mayor Jason Hute suggested that the state officials be contacted and urged to act quickly.

He noted that the bids are good for 60 days starting from Jan. 14.

"We don't want to have to rebid this," Hute said. "Everybody knows what the numbers are."

Wagner said he also forwarded the message from the EPA project officer to a member of U.S. Rep. Bruce Braley's staff, who has been trying to move the application along on the city's behalf.

"So hopefully we'll see something show up soon," Wagner told the council. City officials also discussed the application status with Braley himself when the First District congressman made a stop in Maquoketa Thursday afternoon, Jan. 28.

In addition to the \$200,000 EPA grant, the city has received other grants, insurance proceeds and donations amount to \$418,250 to pay for the clean-up.

That amount would cover the G&B Construction bid and the \$50,650 the city is paying the Howard R. Green Co. of Cedar Rapids, the project engineers, with \$26,600 left over.



MSP photo by Kelly Gerlach

Sally Christiansen, left, Casey's General Store manager in Maquoketa, and Mary Hanrahan, supervisor, stand in front of the new sub sandwich counter at the west side Casey's location. The sub counter is something new that the east side doesn't offer. Casey's celebrates its official grand opening this weekend with beverage and food specials Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Casey's General Store hosts grand opening

By KELLY GERLACH

Casey's General Store now officially bookends the city of Maquoketa with locations on the west and east entrances to the city.

The west side store celebrates its grand opening for three days this weekend, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 5, 6 and 7. The celebration includes penny-per-ounce fountain drinks, free coffee and various food specials for the public throughout the three days.

Casey's purchased the former Dick's Express gas station and convenience store in the fall of 2009. Crews worked during the fall and winter renovating the space, adding on square footage for a new kitchen, bathrooms and storage. The store is roomier inside, including a much larger counter area and larger aisles than it previously had.

The west side Casey's offers many of the same products and services as the original east side store, according to Mary Hanrahan, supervisor. There's fuel, beverages, pizza, donuts, candy, lottery tickets, etc.

But the west side store offers some

new conveniences, including a sub sandwich counter where customers can order sandwiches all day. According to manager Sally Christiansen, there is a larger variety of flavored coffees and cappuccinos. An aisle display offers desserts, cheesecakes, fruits and pre-made deli sandwiches.

Unlike the east side, the west side Casey's offers 24-hour pay-at-the-pump fuel service.

Hanrahan said a slushie machine should be installed soon and she expects the car wash to be fully operational by grand opening weekend.

The west side Casey's does not carry grocery items because Fareway is across the parking lot, Hanrahan explained.

Casey's opens at 5 a.m. for the early commuters.

"(The new location) will be good for the town," Christiansen and Hanrahan agreed. "It'll be great for the pizza sales with a store on each end of town. And people coming off the highway (Hwy. 64) will be able to stop at Casey's to get their favorites."

School districts ponder financial future viability

By KELLY GERLACH

Three area school districts benefit from their existing course sharing agreements. But can they survive without those agreements or should they expand their agreements by whole grade sharing or reorganizing?

About 90 school board and community members from East Central, Northeast and Preston community school districts gathered in Northeast Elementary School's cafeteria Wednesday, Jan. 27, to learn more about their options as viable school districts and where they go from

here. The school boards will answer the where-they-go-from-here question during numerous meetings in coming months but used last week's meeting as a jumping off point in the decision-making process.

"You should be proud of the tradition of outstanding academic achievement in your districts. That's what we're here to ensure," said Dr. Glenn Pelecky, chief administrator of Area Education Agency 9 and facilitator of Wednesday's meeting.

■ DISTRICTS,
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