

County commissioners get rail project update

By Ray Nolting rnolting@parsonssun.com Dec 16, 2019

OSWEGO — Representatives of Great Plains Industrial Park updated Labette County commissioners on Monday on a railroad rehabilitation project going on in the park.

Great Plains received \$1.64 million from Kansas Department of Transportation to rework 75% of the 30 miles of the north to south rail going through the park, including the addition of heavier continuous rail on the south end that could accommodate engines. The short rail rehabilitation project is geared toward a prospective tenant for the park in early 2020 that would use rail service. But it also may open doors for other tenants who need rail to service their businesses, Great Plains Director Brad Reams told commissioners.

Just word of the rail rehabilitation has led to at least three other leads, Reams said.

“This project will be a catalyst,” Reams said.

“Hopefully, we’ll keep the momentum going,” Commissioner Fred Vail said.

Reams told commissioners about meeting with KDOT and others over a two-month period to find out what options were available to rehab the main rail line and the quick turnaround once funding was identified. Two bridges will be repaired as well.

Reams said KDOT provided 93% of the funding for the economic development project and the local match for construction was 7%.

Besides the prospect that has yet to be named officially by Great Plains, park officials hope to attract transload businesses. These businesses transfer loads from one mode of transportation to another. For example, loads could be shipped by rail to the park and then shipped out on trucks, or visa versa.

Reams said work crews are on site now working on the rails. The bridge work will start in January. He said some 60 semi-tractor loads of railroad ties will be delivered to the park and about 100 trucks carrying rock for the project.

Reams and Becky Dantic, Great Plains project manager, meet monthly with the commission. In months past, before Reams was hired, Tim Peoples, property manager, updated commissioners

with Dantic. Reams and Dantic said by the next meeting they hope to be able to tell commissioners about the tenant tied to the rail improvements and other good news in the pipeline.

In other business, the commission:

— Agreed to allow 911 Director Brandy Grassl to purchase two computers from Higher Calling Technologies in Parsons, a desktop HP Elite for \$1,367 and an HP EliteBook laptop for \$868.

— Met with Jim and Joyce Wells, Oswego, about the appraisal on this home that more than doubled. They say they bought the home for \$88,000 and the recent tax statement showed its value increased to \$181,000. They made a payment under protest, which triggers an informal hearing with the appraiser's office. They don't know why their value increased because all they've done is paint and wallpaper the home. Mr. Wells said the roof still leaks. Commissioners no longer act as the board of equalization and cannot influence appraisals and Commissioner Lonie Addis said the appraiser's office would explain the reasons for the increase at the hearing. Appraiser DeLinda White attended the appointment but didn't make any comments.

— Heard from engineer Bob Chambers of Cook, Flatt and Strobel Engineers that KDOT may offer another round of funding in 2020 that could be used to help pay for replacing the steel truss bridge on 8000 Road near Angola. The program would require a 20% match from the county and Commissioners Addis and Vail were hopeful. So far, the county is about \$600,000 short to pay for replacing the bridge on its own.

— Heard that the wind energy advisory committee will meet at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday at the Labette County Health Department for an organizational meeting and to review the Kansas Open Meeting Act with County Counselor Brian Johnson.

— Heard about a drainage problem on York Road from Roger Duroni. He thinks the ditches need cleaned out or reformed because water streams down the road during rain events. Commissioners said they were familiar with the issue and would ask Public Works about it later Monday.

— Agreed to purchase signs, sign blanks and sign posts from National Sign Co. for \$7,208.30. — Reappointed Brian Williams, Dan Peterson and Ken McNickle to the Great Plains Development Authority board for three years with terms ending Dec. 31, 2022.

- Appointed Dick Surridge to an opening on the Labette No. 9 Fire District board.
- Agreed to allow emergency preparedness director Charlie Morse to purchase a new laptop computer.