

SHOT Show provides industry leads for Great Plains

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A trip to a firearms and ammunition industry trade show has led to a couple of leads for the Great Plains Industrial Park.

Jim Zaleski, the city's economic development director, reported to city commissioners on Monday about his recent visit to the SHOT Show. The show organized by the National Shooting Sports Foundation is the largest gathering of the world's firearms and ammunition manufacturers.

Zaleski said he left the show with information from three businesses that are potentially interested in locating at Great Plains Industrial Park. Two are manufacturers and the other is interested in storage space. Zaleski said he would pass on the leads to Great Plains. He also received three "blind" leads. Those are businesses seeking information that are unwilling to give their company's names.

Zaleski was pleased with the results and would have been happy to get just five or six business cards in the first year of setting up the Great Plains booth at the show instead of hard leads.

"We'll continue to work that industry and hopefully we'll bring something in that can fit into the specialty needs that are provided by the Great Plains Industrial Park," Zaleski said.

Labette County contributed \$3,000 to Zaleski's trip, and a county commissioner had planned to attend it with him but couldn't because of a family health issue. Having only one person at the show made it difficult to man the booth and work the floor. Great Plains gave the city \$2,000 for the show. The three entities are working together under the umbrella of Grow Labette, an economic development initiative started in 2019 that has Zaleski promoting the city, county and industrial park as a whole. Everygy granted the city \$800 for a display and direct mail pieces.

Zaleski's estimated travel costs were \$1,400, including airfare, mileage, food and hotel. The booth cost was \$3,700. Zaleski plans to return to the show next year, but the city probably will fund the entire trip as part of an agreement with Great Plains and the county. The city already has placed a down payment for its booth in 2021.

Zaleski said on Tuesday by email that his attendance at the show was the beginning of the marketing process for Great Plains for potential clients and tenants of the park. Those could include distribution, storage, manufacturing or some other process used by the firearms and ammunition industry. The park is suitable for the industry because it was formerly the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant.

Zaleski said the SHOT Show brings about 60,000 people from the firearms and ammunition industry, which is a \$6.2 billion industry. The show is not open to the public.

Rezoning

In another issue on Monday, the commissioners approved a change in zoning for 3624 Main St., which could become a ministorage site.

The zoning on the property will change from single-family residential (R-1) to service commercial (C-3). The property is at the former location of Kansas Mobile Homes, which had its office across the street. The longtime mobile home business, which closed after the death of its owner, Larry Williams, was allowed to operate in the residential zoning because it was in place before the property was annexed into the city and zoned residential. The Parsons Planning

Commission recommended the change after a hearing on a request from Dave Mattox, Williams' son-in-law.

Commissioner Kevin Cruse asked Laura Moore, the city's zoning administrator, if she was comfortable with the change. The original request was for heavy commercial (C-4) zoning, but when a potential purchase of the land fell through, Moore suggested the more restrictive C-3 zoning instead, and Williams and the planning commission agreed.

"It is a better fit for specifically a couple of projects that he had in mind that will come through," Moore said.

Moore said a potential buyer is seeking a conditional use permit for a business in the C-3 zoning. The planners will consider the request next month.

Commissioner Tom Shaw began going through the list of business types eligible to locate in C-3 with a conditional use permit, and when he came across warehousing and ministorage,

Moore indicated that's the type of business interested in buying the property.

Restaurant grant

Also on Monday the commissioners approved a \$5,000 retail recruitment grant for Nick Fetahu to open Parsons Diner at 1827 Crawford Ave.

Fetahu hopes to open the diner in late February or mid-March in the former location of Deb's Corner Cafe near the intersection of Central Avenue and Crawford.

Zaleski said as with any economic development incentive there is risk involved with the restaurant grant. Some businesses flourish after receiving incentives while others fold within a year. However, the risk is minimal, Zaleski said, because of the small amount of money involved.

Following the rules of the retail recruitment grant, Parsons Diner had to show proof that it invested at least \$25,000 of its own money. Formerly, the program would grant \$5,000 for every \$15,000 of owner investment up to \$15,000 in grants.

Shaw said he had heard more comments about the grant than any other agenda item, and they were all positive.

Parsons Diner will serve American food for breakfast and lunch, but Fetahu may expand into Italian fare eventually. He and a business partner run Norma's Diner in Columbus and recently sold Tuscany Italian Restaurant in Blue Springs, Missouri. He formerly co-owned Joe's Pizza and Pasta in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

In other business the commissioners:

— Heard questions from Commissioner Leland Crooks about purchases for office supplies made from an out-of-town company. Crooks said local businesses should be given every opportunity to sell the city its products. If an out-of-town company is selling something cheaper, local businesses should be allowed to match the price, he said. "I guarantee when I owned a hardware store, I would have matched it every time — every time," Crooks said.

— Authorized the purchase of a 2017 Ford Explorer from the Kansas Highway Patrol for use as a school resource officer vehicle. The SUV has 49,298 miles and is being sold for \$24,250. The SRO's 2010 Ford Crown Victoria is suffering from wear and tear and has maintenance issues.

— Heard Vicki Pribble of Parsons urge the city to build an animal shelter. She said the city has land it already owns that is suitable for a shelter, or dog pound. Pribble said funding could come from the city budget, grants and U.S. Department of Agriculture loans. The animal control officer could man the pound, and volunteers could help care for the animals. Pribble said there are 10 veterinarians in the area who possibly would volunteer to act as "vet on call" for one-week periods. City Manager Debbie Lamb said a city-owned shelter would cost about \$750,000, according to cost estimates completed a couple of years ago. She said a city-owned shelter faces more regulations than privately owned shelters. Pribble also called for a reversal of the city's pit bull terrier ban and for dog tags to be issued for three-year periods instead of two.

Rabies vaccinations are now effective for three years, according to a local vet, and the city requires rabies vaccination records for dog tags.

— Set 10 a.m. Feb. 27 as the time to receive bids on a 2020 self-leveling slope mower.

— Heard Mayor Jeff Perez recommend that instead of fogging the city with mosquito pesticide as Pribble suggested in a Thursday work session, Parsons residents should take their own precautions against mosquito bites, such as wearing repellent and long-sleeve shirts and not going outside at dusk or dawn. Perez had contacted officials from a Colorado city about its fogging program. After checking into the labor cost involved, he decided against fogging in Parsons. Pribble is concerned about the spread of diseases such as West Nile virus through mosquitoes. She also said Thursday that the amount of mosquitoes in the city makes it miserable to go outside. On Monday she distributed information about controlling mosquitoes, including truck spraying and fogging.

— Reappointed Alice Miller, Angie Knight, Yvonne Dixon and Willis Powell to the Parsons Housing Authority board.