

County commissioners sign abatement contracts

By THOMAS JENKINS
Staff Writer

Howard County commissioners signed tax abatement agreements with five wind development companies Monday morning, deals that could net the county an additional half-million dollars next year.

Commissioners signed-off on abatements for Airtricity (Panther Creek Wind Farm project), Padoma (Elbow Creek project), Duke (Ocotillo Windpower project), Invenergy (Gunsight Mountain Wind Energy project) and Iberdola (Wildhorse Mountain Wind Energy project).

According to Terry Wegman, executive director for Moore Development — the local agency that acts as liaison between the wind energy companies and the county's taxing

entities for the purpose of tax abatements — the contracts are for 10 years.

"What the contract does is abate the taxes for these companies for a 10-year period," said Wegman. "In lieu of the taxes they would have paid, the wind energy companies agree to pay \$1,100 per megawatt of power each year, which comes out to an approximate increase in county revenue of \$500,000."

A public hearing conducted prior to approval of the abatements failed to draw any comments from local residents.

"Four of the companies are expecting to begin and complete their projects before the end of 2008, while Iberdola has moved its project back to be completed by the end of 2009," said Wegman. "They all look very viable, and I feel like we're looking at some promising pro-

jects." Wegman said the wind energy companies will pay normally assessed county taxes until their projects are completed, at which time the abatements will go into effect.

County officials also approved a tax abatement for the Settles Hotel Development Company during the meeting, following a presentation from Big Spring City Attorney Linda Sjogren.

"The abatement we're asking for is a 10-year agreement for 100 percent of taxes," Sjogren told commissioners. "Mr. (Brint) Ryan is making a sizable investment in this project, which will most likely lose money for a number of years."

Ryan's company announced plans for a \$12 million renovation project — which includes plans for commercial and residential use of the property,

with retail space available on the first and second floors — more than a year ago.

The abatement, which commissioners approved by a unanimous vote, extends not only to the work expected to be done to the historic hotel, but also to other properties near the Settles recently purchased by SHDC.

Also during the meeting, commissioners took action on a pair of tracts of land associated with the upcoming construction of a new county jail.

The court agreed to purchase a strip of land — located on U.S. Highway 80, between Utah and Wright, on the city's west side — from land owner Clay Harris for \$10,000.

"It's a small lot in the northeast portion of the block," said County Judge Mark Barr. "It's where the old motel sits on the

block." Commissioners also gave county officials the go-ahead to begin negotiations with Mona Tonn, owner of Spring Tabernacle Church, for possible purchase of a second parcel of land located within the block.

"This isn't for the area where the church is located," said Commissioner Jerry Kilgore. "Mona has already made it clear she doesn't want to sell that property. This is for a small strip of land located near the church."

Commissioners received the go-ahead from voters in a November bond election for the construction of a \$11.57 million 96-bed jail facility.

Contact Staff Writer Thomas Jenkins at 263-7331 ext. 232 or by e-mail at citydesk@bigspringherald.com

Moore Board approves Settles pact in 4-1 vote

By THOMAS JENKINS
Staff Writer

The board of directors for Moore Development approved the performance and escrow agreements between the economic development corporation and the Settles Hotel Development Company Monday night, moving forward with \$3 million in funding for the restoration of the downtown landmark.

The board approved the agreements on a 4-1 vote, with board member Glenn Fillingim the lone dissenter.

Moore Development

directors voted unanimously in April to provide up to \$3 million to help Brint Ryan — manager of the Dallas company and the founder and CEO of Ryan & Company — renovate the Settles Hotel, which he agreed to purchase for \$75,000 from the city of Big Spring.

According to Terry Wegman, executive director of Moore Development, the two agreements approved by the board spells out what both sides — Moore Development and SHDC — are expected to do.

"The motion was made by board member Larry

McLellan, and directs the board's president — Frank Parker — to execute performance and escrow agreements with Brint Ryan," said Wegman. "The motion also said the agreements are subject to any revisions necessary from the board or its attorney, which basically gives us a chance to clean up some wording in the contracts."

"The performance agreement lays out what is expected of Ryan and SHDC. It also says what Moore Development can — and cannot — provide funding for. We can pay for plumbing, electrical

work, even asbestos abatement. What we can't fund, however, are finishing items, like stair rails and chandeliers."

SHDC announced plans for a \$12 million renovation project in December 2006. According to SHDC officials, the project includes plans for commercial and residential use of the property, with retail space available on the first and second floors.

Wegman said because the expenditure is not a budgeted item, it has to win the favor of the Big Spring City Council before it can become offi-

cial. "It will go before the city council tonight in an emergency item," said Wegman. "That means it won't require a second reading if the council approves it unanimously. If it doesn't pass unanimously, there will have to be a second reading, which would happen at the council's next meeting."

Since announcing the project, Ryan and SHDC have also acquired several other properties, including 313 and 315 Runnels, adjacent to the Settles Hotel, which served as a Greyhound

Station during the hotel's heyday.

Earlier this year SHDC got a helpful nod from the Texas Historical Commission, which confirmed eligibility of the downtown landmark to be nominated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, making the project an "excellent candidate" for federal tax credits, according to Ryan.

Contact Staff Writer Thomas Jenkins at 263-7331 ext. 232 or by e-mail at citydesk@bigspringherald.com

GIVING

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of this area always respond. The people in Big Spring and other communities in the Permian Basin have always come through."

Mobley admits, howev-

er, that this year the Giving Tree ornaments have not been picked up as quickly as they have been in the past.

"I don't know what it is, but I'm sure there are a lot of people that are seeing their cost of living and transportation rising and they're being a little

more hesitant than usual," she noted.

The tree contains the wish list of about 70 children in Howard and Glasscock counties currently under the charge of CPS.

Anyone can participate by picking up an ornament that contains the

child's first name, sizes and gifts desired.

The unwrapped gifts can be delivered to the bank by Friday or the Big Spring CPS office, 501 Birdwell Lane, according to Lopez.

Lopez said she and CPS co-workers Bea Ortega and Maria Saracho will

be happy to accept Giving Tree gifts that are dropped off by the CPS office.

Several volunteers will meet at the Big Spring CPS office to begin wrapping the donated gifts once all of them have been received. Volunteers are encouraged to partici-

pate. For more information, call Lopez, Ortega or Saracho at 263-9662.

Contact Managing Editor John A. Moseley at 263-7331, ext. 230, or by e-mail at editor@bigspringherald.com.

VOTE

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told the court. "Needless to say, they would prefer us to not use their campus as a polling place for that reason."

"I've talked to the people from First Baptist Church, and they were very receptive to the idea. The lobby area is easily accessible and has plenty of power outlets. It's also more centrally located in the precinct, where Goliad school was located along the far edge."

Bloom said area voters can determine whether or not the change will effect

them by simply checking their voter certificate.

"This will effect voter Precincts 33, 34 and 35," said Bloom. "These are the new precinct numbers listed on the newer, orange voter certificates, which were mailed out last week."

Bloom said she hopes the switch doesn't confuse potential voters.

"I'm sure there will be a handful of voters who never check their card and show up to Goliad on the day of the primaries," said Bloom. "However, we're hoping we can get the word out through the media so people will check their precincts ahead of time, avoiding this kind of mix up."

Bloom said recent changes in precinct num-

bers in Coahoma and Big Spring should make it easier for area voters to find their polling places come election day.

"Voters in the cities of Big Spring and Coahoma will notice a change in their voter precinct. For Coahoma, it's simply the letter C added at the end of 207," said Bloom. "This indicates you're inside the city limits and eligible to vote in city elections. For Big Spring, the voter precinct will be changing to a two-digit number, which represent your county precinct and city council district."

Bloom said a voter lives in the county's Precinct 1 and the city's District 1 would have a voter precinct of 11.

"This will allow us to

combine and eliminate some of the 35 voting precincts in our previous system," said Bloom. "We hope this will make it less confusing for voters in the future. It shouldn't have a great impact on

the polling locations and most voters won't see a change in their polling location. We plan to release more on the polling places once we get closer to the next election."

Bloom said anyone with questions regarding their voter card or precincts can contact her office at 264-2273.

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FESTIVAL

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"But that just means that they can come visit us again," Simmons added.

Admission is free to the event, although donations will be accepted.

"Donations are what keep us going," Simmons said. "One hundred percent of the money from donations goes back into the Festival of Lights."

Contact Staff Writer Steve Reagan at 263-7331, ext. 234 or by e-mail at reporter@bigspringherald.com.

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