

Council, park argue over rates

Green Haven RV Park residents, owner could see water costs triple

By Jolene Guzman
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FALLS CITY — The owners of Green Haven RV Park and the city of Falls City can't agree on how the park should be charged for water.

In December, the Falls City City Council asked Mayor Terry Ungricht to negotiate a contract with Green Haven to establish a bill that's more in line with how the rest of the residential customers served by city water are charged.

The park has one meter, so Ungricht recommended the park be changed to a "multiplier" based on the number of "non-temporary" spots in the park. The city charges multipliers to other multi-unit complexes in town.

Councilor Jenn Drill said that after an initial meeting with park owner Richard Bowman and his sons, she was encouraged the two sides would come to an agreement.

Between that gathering and the council's meeting Thursday, something had changed.

Mike Bowman, one of Richard Bowman's sons, read a letter to the council at the meeting outlining his family's objection to the proposed water contract.

He said the contract would charge three times the current bill.

The water bill change stemmed from a previous dispute with the city over whether the recreational vehicles in the park needed to be moved.

The park's permit with the city required RVs to be moved every 180 days.

When the city tried to enforce that provision, the Bowmans presented the city with a state law that said otherwise.

The law states no time limit can be enforced so



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The city of Falls City and Green Haven RV Park are in a dispute over how the park pays for its water. Park owners have rejected the city's proposal for billing changes.

long as there are water, sewer and electrical hookups available.

That is true of 30 spots in the RV park.

The council reasoned if the residents of the park are no longer considered temporary by state law, then they could pay water rates comparable to other city residents.

Mike Bowman disputed that claim.

"These are not permanent homes. Just because a law says they can stay as long as they want, doesn't mean they are permanent residents," he said. "They are on wheels and can be moved at any time."

Ungricht said he tried to address that in the contract, leaving it open for further negotiations if the park lost residents.

"That's why I tried to give them an agreement that offset that," Ungricht said.

Mike Bowman asked that

the city leave the park alone.

"This (contract) is totally unacceptable. If it takes a court of law to show you how outrageous this is, we can let the attorneys handle it," he said. "We can't help feeling picked on, possibly even harassed by the city."

The council previously agreed to have Ungricht charge the park for 30 spots at the residential rate of \$41.96 per month.

However, Ungricht found that the city's code would not allow that.

Instead he would have to charge a multiplier of 30 at a rate of \$108.86, which is the charge for the two-inch water line serving the park.

He said he didn't believe that was the intent of the council to charge that much, so he decided to charge for 10 spots at the \$108.86 rate.

The city's municipal code allows for special contracts

when an "applicant's requirements for water are unusual or large."

"I tried to do a fair agreement, looking at what the intent of council was, keeping it within the way we bill now and looking at what they use for water, so where they were paying somewhat comparable to the other customers in the city," he said.

With negotiations at a stand-still, Ungricht will be informing the park of its new bill.

The park will be charged for 30 "non-temporary" spots, the shower room and the double-wide manufactured manager's residence at the \$108.86 rate, plus \$10 for each hookup for the city's utility reserve fund.

"I will probably draft a letter through our attorney that we will be putting on a multiplier," Ungricht said. "It's going to be a substantial bill."

ODOT: Signal not an option for area

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"We need to make a commitment on something that we know safety and engineering is going to say yes to, and we can work as partners on something that can move forward," Pope continued.

The county has supported installing a traffic light at the intersection for nearly a decade. ODOT has rejected this option, but county officials remain skeptical about the reasons, citing the signal at Hoffman Road as an example of a safety improvement.

"I certainly understand both the desire and the drive to have a signalized intersection out there. I get that," Potter said. "My own opinion, the pursuit of the additional funding and closing the gap on the roundabout is a better long-term solution, and frankly the more likely solution, than to push a signal, frankly, uphill against the state traffic engineer."

Potter said he's fairly confident he could find the funding for a roundabout and the project could begin within three to four years.

The county and ODOT have long disagreed on what would be the best solution at the intersection.

ODOT's preference has been for a roundabout, something the county has objected to because of freight and agricultural equipment mobility.

Polk County Public Works Director Whitaker said Tuesday he still has those concerns, and more, but said he's now more convinced about the safety improvements roundabouts offer.

"I've been skeptical of a roundabout at that location since I've been here, but my mind is changing," he said.

He said that is because ODOT has listened to the concerns of truckers and farmers about design and has responded.

"I don't have a problem recommending to my board that they support a roundabout at this location, because I have hope now that we can do one that will accommodate agriculture, accommodate (trucks) and is a big safety improvement," Whitaker said.

He added that he has concerns about drivers acclimating to using a roundabout and how it would perform during heavy traffic periods, such as the Saturday of the Civil War between University of Oregon and Oregon State football teams.

Those issues, plus farm and trucking mobility, need to be kept in mind during design and engineering.

"I want to see if one goes in here, that it is an example of success," Whitaker said. "If we do it, it's one that we can look at five years from now and say we did good."

Commissioner Mike Ainsworth said he believes citizens will be irritated at the cost difference between a signal — about \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million — and a roundabout when the signal at Hoffman has been successful.

Commissioner Jennifer Wheeler and Pope both agreed with Ainsworth on that point.

Nevertheless, the board voted unanimously to work with ODOT to pursue the additional funding necessary to build a roundabout.

"What I like is that it's now, and we are not going to wait 10 more years," Wheeler said. "We just can't wait any longer."

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