

Platte City talks trash

Commercial trash service, and whether or not the City of Platte City should be the exclusive provider of that service in the City, proved a contentious issue for the Platte City Board of Aldermen.

Late last year, a local businessman suggested the City allow him to use a cheaper private vendor, instead of City service. This posed the Board with the question if they should allow commercial accounts to choose an outside provider. Earlier this month, the Board briefly considered the possible effects such an allowance could have on the City.

City Administrator Keith Moody said such a change could potentially affect the cost of residential trash service, as well as other City services

Board President Aaron Jung said after looking into the subject and talking to local business owners, he felt there was a discrepancy in how commercial accounts were billed, and which ones were charged a user fee for using a contract service for special trash needs.

“If Platte City wants to be in the trash business, we need to be competitive,” said Alderman Andy Stanton. “I think this whole thing stinks.”

He suggested the City open the market to private vendors for commercial accounts, while Alderman Ken Brown said he would like to see an analysis of the potential impact on other City staff and services if the market were opened.

Roger Smith, the owner of the strip mall that is home to both Mr. Goodcents and Pizza Shoppe — large trash producers — said he pays \$350 per month for a three-yard Dumpster, where in Grandview at another property he pays \$125 for an eight-yard Dumpster with a private contract.

“I feel like as a business owner I’m being penalized because I have two food tenants,” he said. “I’m paying through the nose and not getting the service I need.”

The board voted to rescind the user fee for Running Horse Ranch and Home, whose owner protested his fee, and to readdress the issue at the Feb. 12 meeting.

Rally approved

The Board of Aldermen unanimously approved a special event permit to host a motorcycle rally to benefit Boys Hope Girls Hope. The rally will be held Sept. 5-7 on Main Street, with PrimeFlight Aviation Services footing the bill.

Marty Whitaker and Steve Schilling of PrimeFlight Aviation Services and Gary Christ of Boys Hope Girls Hope attended the meeting, describing their organizations, and the event. Scheduled to begin Sept. 5 at Harrah’s Casino in North Kansas City, bikers would then ride to Platte City Friday night and come back Saturday and Sunday for music, vendors and family-oriented activities.

Whitaker said the event is expected to draw thousands of people to the Platte City area, and PrimeFlight is working on attracting a big-name musical performer for the event. They are considering Toby Keith, and expect appearances by players from the Kansas City Chiefs as well as other local celebrities.

“Because this is for Boys Hope Girls Hope, it will be a family event,” Whitaker said. “It won’t be a lot of bikers by themselves just drinking and listening to music. They will bring their families.”

Dearborn bank robbed

Authorities are investigating a robbery that took place at the Dearborn Branch of Platte Valley Bank Jan. 22.

At approximately 11:30 a.m., the Platte County Sheriff's Department, who handles police service in Dearborn, was notified an unarmed white male had entered the bank, demanded money and left on foot.

The man is described as in his late 20s to early 30s, white, but with a dark complexion, approximately five feet, three inches tall and with a slight build. He was wearing a stocking cap, sunglasses, jeans and Carhartt jacket. As of Tuesday afternoon, he had not been apprehended.

Platte Valley Bank President and co-CEO Jerry Hagg said six employees were in the building when the robbery occurred.

"Naturally, they were all shook up like you would expect them to be," he said. "But everyone is fine. No one was injured and that is the main thing."

The robbery was the second at the bank, which first opened for business in Dearborn in 1933. The first took place on Nov. 12, 1982.

Hagg said the two robberies are connected in an unexpected way.

"Ironically, one of our current employees at the bank who was there today, was also in the bank when it was robbed 25 years ago," he said. "She was a customer in the bank with her small child."

Hagg said the bank re-opened for business Tuesday afternoon.

"We want to thank the authorities for responding in such prompt fashion and hope they catch the person who did this," he said.

R-3 makes dramatic schedule change

Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are a relatively new tool for school districts to help teachers instruct more efficiently and students learn more effectively. PLCs are based on providing collaboration time for teachers, where data may be disseminated, ideas shared, goals set and practices implemented.

PLCs have gained steam among the Platte County R-3 teaching staff in the past year. So much so, that R-3 administrators are convinced that setting aside designated PLC time for teachers will result in better-educated students. That initiative was presented to the R-3 Board of Education at its meeting last week in the form of a dramatic adjustment to the 2008-09 school calendar. After a lengthy discussion, the Board unanimously approved dismissing classes two hours early on the first and third Wednesdays of each month so that teachers may collaborate.

"We are convinced PLC collaboration will make our teachers more effective and our students more successful," Assistant Superintendent Rob Gardner told the Board.

Gardner and Assistant Superintendent Dr. Mike Reik conducted conversations with teachers — including Barry School administrators and PLC advocates Rebecca Henshaw and Devon Doll — and have made extensive studies on PLCs and their effectiveness. Reik told the Board he is convinced it will make the R-3 staff more effective.

"We are totally convinced of the potential upside for the school district and its teachers and students," he said. "Otherwise, we would not have brought such a recommendation to you."

R-3 Superintendent Dr. Mark Harpst said he was leery of the proposal at first.

“They (Gardner and Reik) spent a lot of time convincing me of the need for making room on the calendar for it,” he said. “But, PLCs make sense. Many school districts who are achieving at high rates are implementing them.”

School board members agreed that the implementation of PLCs and setting aside designated time for collaboration has great merit, but concerns were discussed. Chief among them was the public perception of taking instruction time away.

“Parents are constantly being told their student needs to come in early to do this or spend more time to be effective at this, and now we are telling them we are going to dismiss classes early,” Board member Mary Temperelli said. “You don’t need to convince me of the worthiness of this, I know that it will be beneficial. But, as a parent, if I did not know what I know, it would not sit well with me.”

Reik acknowledged that informing the public and convincing them of the benefits of the early dismissals might be a tough battle.

“It could be difficult and that’s what we are charged with — convincing our patrons that our students will be the better for it,” he said.

Reik said many questions were brought up in meetings concerning the PLCs and early dismissal. Issues discussed included:

- Differentiating between planning and collaboration. Teachers already have designated planning periods in which they return phone calls, prepare lesson materials, schedule field trips, grade papers and take care of other daily duties. Collaboration is meant to provide teachers with data analysis, informed lesson study and team-based professional development aimed at focusing on what students need to succeed. Collaboration is also different than the benefits teachers receive during in-service days throughout the year. In-service days are needed for new textbook and resources training and other types of staff development that are not collaborative in nature.
- Loss of instructional time. “We are looking at the loss of instructional time versus the improvement of instructional efficiency,” Reik said. “We believe the benefits outweigh that loss of time.” Reik said schedules may be adjusted or rotated on early-release days to ensure that students receive the same amount of instruction in each class.
- Designating time for PLC collaboration before or after school. Reik said to pay the district’s teaching staff for the four extra hours per month would cost about \$375,000 annually in additional salary expenses. He also said that increasing the number of contracted teaching days was considered. “It’s true that we have less teacher contract days than most large metropolitan school districts, but again, we spend about \$10,000 per hour for our staff to be in session,” he said.
- Impact on patrons’ childcare expenses. Reik said this would prove problematic for working parents with younger school children. “We are open for suggestions here,” he said. “However, we should be careful in setting precedents.”

Reik also admitted that the school district would be at the forefront of dedicating time and resources to PLCs.

“Only two school districts in the area — Truman and William Chrisman — spend more time on PLCs than we will,” he said. “We consider our district a model district and we think this will help keep us there.”

Lewis Gowin, a regional PLC director who was present at the meeting, concurred.

“No other district is doing what you are talking about doing,” he said. “You will definitely be the pioneer in the area for establishing common time for PLC collaboration.”

Other significant dates from the approved 2008-09 school year calendar include: first day of classes — Aug. 25; winter break — Dec. 20-Jan. 4; spring break — April 9-12; and the last day of classes — May 22.