

Moscow-Pullman Daily News - DNews.com

Public works/finance members take exception to Chaney's suggestions to Whitman County

By Tara Roberts, Daily News staff writer
June 10, 2008

Moscow Mayor Nancy Chaney wanted to send a strong message to Whitman County commissioners.

Members of the City Council's Public Works/Finance Committee thought she overstepped her bounds.

Committee members met Monday and shot down all but one of Chaney's suggestions to Whitman County regarding a grant application to pay for infrastructure at the site of the Hawkins Companies' controversial development just across the state line from Moscow.

Whitman County is applying for up to \$1 million a year for 25 years through the Washington state Local Infrastructure Financing Tool program. The money would help pay for \$18.1 million of public infrastructure in a "Revenue Development Area" that includes the Hawkins Companies' retail development, as well as property south of Hawkins.

Chaney edited and approved a letter written by city Public Works Director Les MacDonald that included seven points of comment about the county's LIFT application.

"If we were applying for anything to that effect, I don't know that I would want Whitman County telling me, or telling us, what we should do about it or how we should approach it," Councilman Dan Carscallen said.

The lone point Public Works/Finance Committee members decided to let Chaney send asks Whitman County to use caution if it builds a wastewater treatment facility near Moscow drinking-water wells.

The original letter included information Chaney said needs to be pointed out to the state officials who review LIFT grant applications. For example, the original letter stated that water quality treatment and sanitary sewer booster stations will likely be needed to serve the development area, though they are not on the application's list of infrastructure improvements.

Chaney said Whitman County may have chosen not to include those items, but if they were forgotten it is "a serious oversight."

Chaney also questioned how Whitman County intends to provide water to the development areas outside the Hawkins project. Moscow has agreed to provide water to the county for Hawkins' development only.

The original letter further suggested that elements of Moscow's large scale retail ordinance, known as the big-box ordinance, could be used for projects within the development area.

Chaney said she doesn't demand that Whitman County adopt the whole ordinance. The point is meant to say, "Gee, Whitman County, take it or leave it, but you may not have to reinvent the wheel here."

Other points in the original letter praised parts of Whitman County's application, such as including a frontage road and improvements for bicycle/pedestrian trails.

Carscallen and Councilmen Walter Steed and John Weber said they felt the letter amounted to Moscow getting too involved with Whitman County's project.

Councilman Bill Lambert sent an e-mail to the Public Works/Finance Committee in agreement.

"I also feel strongly that we should not get our staff involved with doing research, writing letters and spending numerous hours on something that quite frankly isn't our business," Lambert wrote. "Our staff as well as our Mayor and Council needs to focus on what's happening here in Moscow."

Carscallen said Moscow shouldn't be offering up the big-box ordinance when "we haven't even gotten to try it yet to see how it's going to work."

Weber said parts of the letter seemed to be offering Whitman County free engineering advice.

MacDonald said it's normal for Palouse counties and cities to share such information. He declined to comment further on why he thinks the points the committee cut should be sent to Whitman County.

"Where I stand is immaterial," he said.

Chaney said Moscow is not stepping on Whitman County's toes because the city was invited to comment.

Whitman County Clerk of the Board Maribeth Becker said the county didn't not specifically solicit comment from Moscow, but sent out a notice of public hearing to many local communities, landowners and businesses asking for comments. The public hearing is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Monday at the Whitman County Courthouse.

Chaney said she thinks the council members are being "gun shy" because the LIFT grant is related to the Hawkins project.

"I thought it was more about ideology and digging in the heels than it was the words on the page," she said.

Tara Roberts can be reached at (208) 882-5561, ext. 234, or by e-mail at troberts@dnews.com.