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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

A split vote Monday gave Cimarron Basin Community Corrections director Mike Howell the green light to order two new vehicles for his agency.

CBCC had received bids from four companies, including three local ones, to purchase the new cars. Those bids came prior to the 11 members of the agency's advisory board who were present at a June 10 meeting voting unanimously to approve purchasing two 2014 Chevy Impalas from non-local dealer GSA.

Howell then brought the item before the Seward County Commission Monday, and that board voted to go another direction with the purchasing process.



Howell said GSA is a program through which the Kansas Highway Patrol gets its vehicles, and the Seward County Sheriff's office uses it as well.

Commissioner C.J. Wettstein, who is also chairman of the CBCC board, said the new vehicles would replace two older high-mileage vehicles.

“The two vehicles we’re replacing, one is a 1998 Grand Marquis with 219,131 miles on it, and we’re also replacing a ’98 Ford Taurus that has 184,722 miles on it,” he said.

Wettstein said those two vehicles are still in good shape, mostly due to a good maintenance program through CBCC.

“When you start looking at 219,000 miles or 180,000, they’re taking care of them,” he said.

Wettstein said, however, with the high amount of mileage on those models, it was time to upgrade.

Howell said he budgeted for two vehicle purchases in his 2013 budget and the funds were “state” money.

The two Impalas quoted by GSA came in at a total cost of about \$35,000. The three local bids all came in at under that price, and commissioner Jim Rice liked one particular bid he saw in Monday’s agenda packet.

“Chrysler Corner gives you a bid for \$30,800,” he said to Howell. “Is that right?”

Howell affirmed that price was for two vehicles.

“I told them that we wanted two, so I assume it’s \$15,000,” he said.

Rice then compared the two bids starting with the one for two Dodge Avengers from Chrysler Corner.

“That bid is \$30,800, and this bid from GSA is \$35,000,” he said.

Wettstein explained why the CBCC board opted to go with the non-local bid.

“The Chrysler Corner ones are two used ones with 2013 (models) with 20,000 to 25,000 on each one of them, and the GSA one is a 2014 new one,” he said.

Rice said he did not want to be wasteful with taxpayer money, no matter where it came from.

“I realize it’s state money, but in effect, it’s our money,” Rice said.

Wettstein then pointed to the larger size of the cars from GSA.

“The Avenger is a mid-size car and has a four-cylinder engine,” he said. “The Impala’s a V-6.”

Following a little more discussion, Rice then made a motion to buy the Dodge Avengers from Chrysler Corner. Commissioner Doug LaFreniere seconded the motion.

After commissioner Randy Malin questioned Howell about the minimum specifications in the bid packet, the board voted 3-2, with Wettstein and chairman Ada Linenbroker voting against, to approve the purchase of the Avengers for \$30,800.

Following the vote, commissioners went into a short discussion, and Wettstein made it clear that he was not happy with the reversal of the CBCC board's decision.

"We have about 13, 14 people come into every meeting," he said of the CBCC board. "If we're going to do this, maybe we ought to just let the commission make all the decisions."

Howell said the recommendation to buy the GSA models came from his board.

"I didn't recommend anything on the car," he said. "I presented the same information to the advisory board, and that's what they chose to do."

Rice said there is a clear advantage with going with a local vendor.

"I think if we have problems with them, at least, we have a local dealer who will take care of them," he said.

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