

Commissioners say they will support issue individually

By ROBERT PIERCE

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While each of them seemed to be supporting the issue individually, only one of the five Seward County commissioners was in favor of the board throwing its support behind a bond issue and sales tax initiative.

No official vote was taken, but as a whole, the comments made by commissioners were decidedly against signing a letter in support of the initiative by the City of Liberal and USD No. 480 to upgrade district schools.

Chairman Ada Linenbroker, the lone commissioner in favor of sending the letter, attended more than a dozen meetings of the Committee for Responsible Growth and public meetings designed to come up with a solution for space issues in Liberal schools. She said she was impressed with how the USD 480 Board of Education handled the bond issue this time around compared to the last vote that took place in 2009.



“They used people for the whole community such as business owners, ministers, along with churches,” she said. “They had parents of elementary, middle and high school students, teachers from all the schools. They had high school students there and college students that had been in Liberal schools.”

Linenbroker said at the meetings, discussions took place in regards to what people felt was needed to fix the space problems.

“The teachers talked about problems and issues they had in schools,” she said. “Students explained the problems they had. At these meetings, things were discussed, and several ideas were suggested for forming a plan of what we needed.”

Linenbroker said that information was then taken to public meetings where the community was invited to discuss what was good and bad about the different project ideas.

“Over this extended period, projects were reduced, new plans were designed, but the plans were made from the input they got from the public,” she said. “I feel this bond represents what the citizens of Liberal and Seward County want, and we should support the bond issue and sales tax and let the people in our city and county vote on it this year.”

Linenbroker then outlined where the money for the project would come from should the bond issue pass.

“One of the main reasons I would support the bond issue with a half cent sales tax is we will be using the state of Kansas match, which is 49 percent or \$63 million that would be paid out of Kansas tax money,” she said. “The other part is with the half cent sales tax, 22 percent of the bond will be paid with sales tax, which just leaves 29 percent of the overall project to come out of property tax.”

Linenbroker said with that plan in place, a huge burden is taken off the shoulders of county property owners, and the Liberal community would get back some of the tax money sent to the state over the years.

“The sales tax will be a more fair way of spreading the burden on the public to shop in Liberal, whether they are local or people from the surrounding area,” she said.

Linenbroker said a majority vote from the community in favor of the bond issue and sales tax initiative is a needed one.

“The children of Seward County, whether they live in town or in the county, need to have the best education we can provide in a safe, uncrowded and up to date building that we can provide,” she said. “What I’m asking for is just that we support the school board and the city with the half cent sales tax.”

Linenbroker said with the county on board with the project, the bond issue and sales tax initiative is more likely to pass.

“I want to let them know that we’re trying to work together as a community, and I think the county ought to support these other two entities in this project,” she said.

Linenbroker then opened up the discussion for comments from the other commissioners. Doug LaFreniere began by saying while he is in favor of the item as a whole, the board should not necessarily formally declare its support.

“For us to be involved in it or for us to write a letter proposing that we are all in favor as a board, that puts two taxing entities together in collusion,” he said. “They’ve got enough organized people on this issue that they do not need another government taxing entity. This is their issue. It just puts a distrust under my constituents.”

Commissioner Jim Rice agreed, saying those outside the Liberal city limits will not be able to vote on the sales tax portion of the item.

“It’s a very needed project, and it would add a great deal to our economic situation here in the county,” he said. “I don’t know that I can support this because I don’t get to vote on 100 percent of the items. I think it’s important that each of us perhaps make a statement whether we support it or not.”

Commissioner C.J. Wettstein, who owns a business in downtown Liberal, said he is affected by the measure, but because he resides in rural Seward County, he too does not get a vote on the sales tax.

“I feel that our constituents need to look at it very strongly, make a decision on their own, and either they’re going to vote yes on it, or they’re going to vote no,” he said. “I don’t know that this would really sway anybody to vote, but I don’t think we should support it as a commission.”

Linenbroker said she understood the feelings of the other commissioners, but she still plans to write a letter individually in support of USD 480 and the City of Liberal.

“I just am trying to show my support for these other two entities,” she said. “They’ve worked really hard on this project to come up with a way to solve this problem without having to charge so much tax.”