

Crofton

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submit payment accordingly,” Avery wrote. “We anticipate starting the fieldwork in October 2015.”

State officials recommend the city cancel or revise any current contracts for conducting the fiscal year 2015 audit, Avery wrote. Otherwise, the city may have to pay for both audits.

“In addition, we strongly recommend all audit contracts should have an out clause in the event the Auditor of Public Accounts deems it necessary to conduct an examination in accordance with Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 84-304,” Avery added.

THE CITY RESPONDS

Hendrix responded to Avery’s letter, pledging the city’s cooperation to the best of its ability.

“Although (the current situation) is a bit nerve racking, we are pleased to have your involvement in our audit this

year,” Hendrix wrote. “In the past three months, we have replaced most, if not all, of our senior leadership team. When the prior employees left, they took with them our institutional history.”

City officials have worked to compile past financial records, Hendrix said.

“Since that time (of the former employees’ departure) we have worked hard, with the help of temporary staff and external consultants, to piece together the workings of the prior system,” she said. “Our new clerk was appointed at our last City Council meeting. We are currently in the process of hiring a part-time bookkeeper to assist us in hour.”

The city is also undertaking financial reforms by adopting and implementing new policies and procedures, Hendrix wrote. Next year, the city anticipates an overhaul of its ordinances, she added.

“We expect that these actions will ensure compliance and optimal operations moving forward,” she wrote. “Our hope is that you (state officials) will take these ef-

forts into consideration as you draft findings.”

In her report to the city, Hendrix reported only one candidate had applied for the bookkeeping position. The city will continue seeking more candidates for the part-time position, she said.

During the meeting, she asked the council whether it would consider putting money into updating the city’s computer software rather than spend it on hiring a bookkeeper. No decision was made.

IN NEGOTIATIONS

Before Monday’s council meeting, Hendrix told the *Press & Dakotan* that negotiations are nearing completion with Foxhoven and her lawyer, Norfolk attorney Ron Temple.

“We are in the final stages and expect a finalized agreement to be signed any day,” Hendrix said.

Hendrix declined to list the amount of misappropriate funds or any details of the proposed settlement agreement.

“We’re not allowed to

release any of that information until the final agreement is signed,” she said.

At this point, no criminal charges have been filed in the case, Hendrix said. However, action would need to be taken should any illegal activity arise from the audit, she said.

Avery emphasized the point in her letter to Crofton city officials.

“Although our audit may not reveal all errors, irregularities or illegal acts which may have occurred during the year, please be advised it is our responsibility to ensure the City is informed of any significant illegal acts we become aware of during our audit,” Avery wrote.

“If the illegal act involves funds from other government entities, it is the City’s responsibility to inform the other entities of these acts.

“If the City’s management and Council are involved in the illegal act or do not report such to the other governmental entities on a timely basis, we, as auditors, will be obligated to report the illegal acts to these governmental entities.”

The state auditors will anticipate the receipt of all necessary city documents, Avery wrote.

“We understand all records, documentation and information we request in connection with our audit will be made available to us,” she said.

TAKING STEPS

In the meantime, the Crofton city council has undertaken measures to protect the city finances and to help the city adjust to whatever is found in the audit.

The recent increase in city property taxes was undertaken to provide the city with needed funding for its operations, Hendrix said. The additional money will allow Crofton to handle whatever funding shortfalls, if any, that may arise following the audit and adjustment of accounts.

In addition, city officials have considered what impact, if any, that financial shortfalls may mean for both proposed and current city

projects. The city may need to delay or scrap some of its plans for the time being.

“We want to make sure we have the resources for whatever comes up,” Hendrix told the *Press & Dakotan*.

However, Hendrix reassured Crofton residents that the city remains on firm footing.

“The city finances are coming along,” she said.

Besides dealing with the misappropriated funds, the city’s financial reforms should help ensure stability in city operations, Hendrix said.

“It was the right time to do housekeeping and bring things up to date,” she said.

The next regular Crofton city council meeting is set for Nov. 2. More information on the state audit, the settlement with Foxhoven, city finances and further changes in city procedures may be handled at that time.

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Webster

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raise that money.”

As a result, the Yankton School District began working on an alternative way to get the equipment set up without postponing the construction.

CSP inmates volunteered the first three weekends in August – a total of 220 hours – just before school started. The inmate volunteers were supervised by Webster school staff and members of WOW who were trained by representatives from the Bureau of Prisons.

“Without the inmates, there is absolutely no way the equipment could have been put together,” Ryken said.

Yankton School District is one of 18 CSPs with which inmates have been authorized to assist. While this is the first time assembling playground equipment, the inmate volunteers regularly assist with Habitat for Humanity, the Heartland Humane Society, Yankton Chamber of Commerce and several area museums.

Recently, inmates volunteered to build scenery with “old west” themes for activities that occurred during the National Field Archery Association Foundation World Archery Youth Champion-

ships. Inmates have also used donated materials or scrap lumber to build playhouses that were auctioned off to raise money for local charities.

According to Yankton’s FPC staff, inmates benefit from the volunteer program because it gives them a sense of belonging and provides them with the experience of making a positive difference in a community. Inmate volunteers develop social attitudes, like being part of a team with a shared goal. They also learn new skills that can increase employability.

“Inmate volunteers reported that working a project like this was very rewarding,” said Eric Henning, public information officer at Yankton’s FPC. “They enjoyed being able to make a positive difference and give something back to the community. They took pride in working hard to help kids have a safe, fun playground.”

Along with the help of the inmates, the project received a number of volunteers on the construction process. That included Webster dads like Tim Caba, who acted as the foreman for the project. He and the other fathers studied plans, laid out equipment rentals and took time off of work to help.

“People came and went, but Tim never left,” Ryken said. “He was here when the

sun rose and he was here when the sun went down. We owe a lot to him.”

The new playground was a great success, but it did not come easy.

The equipment shipped from Japan, and the company could never give the school a specific date on when it would arrive. Volunteers, who work during the day, needed time to schedule days off to help out. By the time administration heard from the company on

when exactly it would arrive, it was only a few days before the equipment came.

On July 20, construction began. After working for a weekend or two, volunteers realized that there were five parts missing.

It was a three-week lag waiting for those parts,” Ryken said. “We were getting into crunch time for school.”

Those parts finally arrived the weekend of Riverboat Days in late August. The

volunteer dads worked that weekend and put the finishing touches on the rubber mulch fall material the day of the school’s open house.

Despite the delays in construction, Ryken believes the end result made it all worthwhile.

“We haven’t gotten off of it,” she said. “It is the hit of the neighborhood. It definitely turned into a neighborhood park, which is what we wanted it to be.”

The kids voice their love on a daily basis for the new equipment. On a trip to Mrs. Holmstrom’s second grade classroom, several students shared how they felt about their playground.

“The best play ground that ever was made,” said one student. “It is really awesome and huge.”

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