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Commission supports methane gas concept

By Paul Teague, Local News Editor

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During its meeting Monday night at the City-County Chambers in Lenoir, the Caldwell County Board of Commissioners endorsed a methane gas recovery and reuse project, which would include a cash contribution from Google, at the former Mt. Herman landfill.

Though the terms of the agreement have not been announced formally, the county plans to contract with Arlington, Va.-based Greenhouse Gas Services to capture methane at the landfill site and sell the carbon credits to Google. For its part, Google would make a one-time payment of \$165,000 to build a 4,000-square-foot greenhouse at the landfill, which would be used by Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute for its horticulture program.

In addition to the one-time payment, Google also would pay \$1 per ton to the county for the life of the project for amounts collected above 60,000 tons during a three-year period.

The project would represent an extension of the methane flaring that the county has been doing at the Mt. Herman site since March 2007.

"This is a great opportunity and concept," Google Operations Manager Tom Jacobik said. "This is a first ground-up, carbon offset program."

In additional environmental discussions, the commissioners directed interim County Manager Bobby White to study the potential of converting county vehicles to operate on compressed natural gas.

Meanwhile, the board scheduled a public hearing for Monday, Oct. 6 at 10 a.m. to discuss the economic incentives package offered to Broyhill Industries. The company announced Thursday that it plans to consolidate all of its upholstery

operations at the former Pacemaker plant in Lenoir, a move that is projected to create 400 new jobs.

Broyhill has been awarded a \$2 million One North Carolina Grant from the North Carolina Department of Commerce. As part of the required matching funds, the county has pledged to contribute \$500,000, including \$450,000 within 30 days of the agreement. The remaining portion of the county's contributions would be paid in 2009 and 2010.

In a related matter, the commissioners accepted a recommendation by the Sales Tax Reinvestment Committee to contribute \$1 million toward matching the state grant. Under terms of the committee's recommendation, \$600,000 of its unobligated fund balance would be paid within a month of the agreement. Additional amounts of \$200,000 each would be paid in 2009 and 2010.

Also, the commissioners authorized using a portion of funds set aside for a proposed new EMS base in Cahah's Mountain to obtain architectural drawings and conduct environmental assessments.

Caldwell County Emergency Services Director Tommy Courtner also outlined a plan that would add six new full-time paramedics to EMS operations at a projected cost of \$245,000 per year. The commissioners agreed to study the proposal at their Oct. 20 meeting.

In other business, the commissioners:

â€¢ Approved using the services of Dr. Jay Piland for inmate medical care at the detention center. Caldwell County Sheriff Alan Jones said the county had been using in-house services with licensed nurses, but a threatened action by the North Carolina Board of Nursing would have halted the practice.

Piland currently provides services to Alexander, Burke, Catawba and Rutherford counties. He has offered to provide inmate care for \$252,000 per year.

â€¢ Approved a \$2,000 appropriation out of the contingency fund to help the Caldwell County Council for Women obtain tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) status that would allow the organization to accept tax-deductible donations.

â€¢ Approved the 2009 Schedule of Values for the Caldwell County Tax Office.

â€¢ Accepted draft language for the negotiation of public water rights agreements with private property owners.

â€¢ Recognized retiring EMS employees William Kiger and Carl Dewey Sr. Kiger served as a paramedic for more than 30 years, while Dewey was a full-time paramedic for five years

and part-time employee for three years.

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