

Butte firm optimistic about meth treatment center

Lewistown News-Argus, 11/12/05

A bidders' conference in Helena, held Oct. 19, was encouraging to firms that are interested in building a meth treatment center in Lewistown.

Jason Kovnesky, director of development and administration for Community, Counseling and Correctional Services Inc., the Butte firm wanting to build a meth treatment center in Lewistown, told the Fergus County Port Authority Board Wednesday he is encouraged because his firm seems far ahead of its competitors.

Nonprofit firms from Helena and Billings, as well as CCCS, attended the conference, as did two out-of-state for-profit firms. The presence of those two out-of-state firms surprised CCCS representatives because legislation authorizing construction of a meth treatment center specifically limits bidders to in-state nonprofit firms, Kovnesky said.

Kovnesky said questions from the other firms indicated CCCS' plans in Lewistown are far ahead. The other firms are just starting the process while CCCS and Lewistown groups have been at work on the project for about two years, he said.

About 30 questions were submitted by bidders and the Department of Corrections (DOC) responded on Nov. 1, Kovnesky said. He said the most important questions dealt with flushing out the department's specifications including medical care and programming requirements.

On Jan. 10, the DOC is to have all the proposals reviewed and scored. The state agency has indicated it will award the contract for construction by March 1, 2006. But DOC officials told CCCS representatives they may be able to award the contract sooner.

"We're very confident that Lewistown is in the running because of all the work we have done over the years," said Kovnesky. Once the contract is awarded, he said, it will take 12 to 14 months to build the structure on Lewistown Municipal Airport land bordering on Airport Road.

He said while the deliberations are going on in Helena, the public hearing process will continue in Lewistown. So far, there is no indication that the Billings or Helena firms plan public hearings any time soon, Kovnesky said.

The public hearings will be held in Lewistown during the next two weeks. The first will be part of the Fergus County Commission meeting at 4 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 16, in the basement of the Fergus County Sheriff's Complex. The second will be part of the Lewistown City Commission's Committee of the Whole meeting at 6 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 21, at the Central Montana Community Center.

Both meetings are being held in an effort to explain the project to the community and to solicit public comment. Kovnesky said CCCS representatives plan to make presentations of about 10 minutes at each meeting. Rep. Jim Peterson (R-Buffero) and Rep. Ed Butcher (R-Winifred) are expected to attend both meetings, Port Authority officials said.

In the past, CCCS officials mentioned a \$6.2 million figure for construction costs, but the final figure may be different. Costs will depend on the size of the structure. Kovnesky said

DOC still is talking about an 80- or 120-bed facility for men or for men and women. It may be that another 40-bed facility for women would be built elsewhere.

In addition to these meetings, CCCS' construction and design team has been meeting with representatives of Century Co. and Birdwell Construction, two Lewistown firms expected to be involved in construction of the meth treatment center. Kovnesky said he expects to have cost estimates by Dec. 1.

"You will hear quite a lot about a 120-bed facility at these meetings because we do not want that to come as a surprise to the people of Lewistown. We want everyone to know it may be 120 beds here," Kovnesky told the Port Authority Board.

At a meeting Nov. 3, the Lewistown Municipal Airport Board approved realignment of the structure so that the treatment center's parking lots will be located between the building and the d'Autremont Sports Complex. An access road to the airport between the two facilities will be paved.

"At the bidders' conference we outlined the delivery system we propose and there were no outstanding questions about it," said Kovnesky.