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Williston residents continue seeking relief from Williston Peanut dryers' noise



Dewayne Williams on Tuesday night (Jan. 10) asks Williston City Council members why something hasn't been done to reduce noise levels at a Williston Peanut drying operation. He approached

the city with this issue previously, because he contends the city is failing to enforce its noise ordinance.

Story and Photo By Terry Witt, Senior Reporter, © Jan. 12, 2017 at 2:47 p.m.

WILLISTON -- A spokesman for a neighborhood near a place Williston Peanuts Inc. runs peanut-drying machines asked Williston City Council members Tuesday (Jan. 10) why the city hasn't enforced the city's noise ordinance with regard to peanut dryers that roar all night and keep residents awake.

The city offered to bring the two sides together for discussions.

Dewayne Williams said he has already sat down with Williston Peanuts' officials to discuss the noise problem and didn't reach a solution with the company. He asked if it would be necessary for the residents affected by the loud noise to enforce the city's noise ordinance.

Williston City Manager Scott Lippmann said it wouldn't be necessary for residents to enforce the city ordinance. It is not the city's responsibility to sit down between two private parties either, Lippmann added, nor should the city dictate how the problem should be fixed.

Williams said he just wants the noise ordinance enforced.

The issue was not listed on the city council's agenda and Williston Peanut representatives were not present to respond to the complaint.

Williston Peanut is one of the longtime agriculture businesses in the Williston area. During the peanut season, the company sometimes has as many as two dozen 18-wheel trucks hooked to powerful air driers that blow warm air through the peanuts to dry them. Other smaller truckloads are being dried as well.

The city's noise ordinance contains language allowing the city to measure decibel levels to determine whether a noise source is violating the ordinance. City officials say that while the ordinance is enforceable, it is not well written.

It's not clear how the company could control the noise even if the ordinance was enforced. The company at one point brought in railroad boxcars to act as a noise shield,

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city officials said, but the noise wasn't reduced by much.

Williams asked politely why the city had done nothing since October when he first brought this noise issue to the attention of the council. Lippmann responded the City Council has discussed the issue at four different council meetings.

"The city's working on it," he said.

Council President Charles Goodman suggested Williams call the police and report the violation to give the city a written record of what happened.

"We can act on it," Goodman said.

Williams said he has already done that. He has reported noise ordinance violations to city police.

Williams said neighbors of Williston Peanuts aren't trying to put the company out of business, nor do they want to harm the company, but he added, "We think we should be able to sleep at night."

Williams said he would carry Lippmann's offer to bring the two sides together back to the residents he represents.

The loud noise comes during the peanut season in late fall when green peanuts must be dried to make them marketable.

Williston City Council president apologizes for resident's list of utility problems



Tim Street reads from a prepared statement about a list of problems he said he has had with Williston's utility services.

Story and Photo By Terry Witt, Senior Reporter, © Jan. 12, 2017 at 2:47 p.m.

WILLISTON -- Williston City Council President Charles Goodman apologized at Tuesday's (Jan. 10) meeting to resident Tim Street for the times when city utility employees and the city's garbage contractor gave him poor customer service or the brush off.

Among other things, Street alleged that the city's garbage disposal company, Waste Pro has twice neglected to pick up garbage on his two-block long street and often leaves a trail of sticks, limbs and leaves on the street when picking up yard trash.

Contacted Thursday (Jan. 12) with this statement, a spokesman for Waste Pro shared

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some insight.

“We take care of any complaints that day,” Operations Manager Darren Matthews said. “We can’t take care of it if we don’t know about it. Please notify us or City Hall when there is complaint with our service.”

Street continued on Tuesday night. He said on one occasion when his water bill was twice what it normally is he called the city to complain, but was told that he was wrong. He insisted on a re-read of the meter and eventually was found to be correct. He said the re-read of the meter should have been automatic when he reported the sharp rise in water use.

When a coupling in his water meter sprang a leak and covered the meter with muddy water, Street said he called the city and was told the meter couldn’t be leaking because his water use was below the monthly average. He said the meter reader had guessed at the reading when he couldn’t see through the muddy water and the guesswork skewed the numbers.

Street read from a long list of problems he has allegedly experienced with city utility officials and made several suggestions for improving customer service -- including better communication between departments and more sensitivity to customer complaints.

Williston City Manager Scott Lippmann asked for a copy of Street's presentation. Lippmann said would investigate Street’s complaints and return with answers, hopefully by the next City Council meeting.

Lippmann said the contract with the trash company comes up for renewal in March. He said the yard debris has been a problem for years. City crews are sent to clean up the mess left behind by the contractor.

Street said the garbage service was better when the city picked up the garbage rather than a private contractor. He recalls the reason for hiring the contractor was to save on costs by eliminating two positions, but he said only one position was eliminated.

Goodman said the city shouldn’t be operating this way. He said this type of behavior is not acceptable to any member of the council.

“We want to improve. I want to take this opportunity to apologize,” Goodman said.

Williston Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat called for better training of employees.

“We’re here to serve the citizens, not to be a block out in front of these citizens,” Hethcoat said.

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Healing Heart Ministries wins Williston permit approval



Robert Potter defends his request for a permit to open a substance abuse ministry in Williston.

Story and Photos By Terry Witt, Senior Reporter © Jan. 12, 2017 at 9:27 p.m.

WILLISTON -- Williston City Council members voted unanimously Tuesday (Jan. 10) to approve a permit allowing a Christian-based ministry to open a club and thrift store to help victims addicted to alcohol and other substances.

The "Healing the Heart – Renewing the Mind Christian 12-Step Ministries also received preliminary approval to change the zoning at 135 S.W. First Ave. from residential multi-family to general commercial.

A second reading of the zoning change ordinance will be necessary for final City Council approval.

The special exception permit was needed to open the thrift store. The store will help fund the services provided to substance abuse victims who participate in the program.

City Council President Charles Goodman and Councilman Elihu Ross received assurances from owners Robert and Jacqueline Potter, and from City Manager Scott Lippmann, that the special exception permit would expire if the property ever changed hands.

"I don't want to see something get started and something else ease in," Ross said.

Lippmann said the special exception was tied to the Christian Ministries program. He said if the Potters ever abandoned or sold the property the special exception would expire.

The city manager, however, said the general commercial zoning would remain with the property even if the Potters closed their operation in the future. General commercial is the broadest category of commercial zoning.

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Williston Councilman Danny Etheridge said goodbye to his fellow council members Tuesday. He is moving to Morriston and can no longer serve. The council can appoint his replacement.

In a final note of business, the City Council said "Goodbye" to Councilman Danny Etheridge. He and his family have moved to Morriston. He can no longer hold office as a city councilman, because he lives outside the city limits.

Etheridge and Matt Brooks were considered bright newcomers to the council. Brooks won election to the Levy County Commission last year and resigned to assume his new office as a county commissioner.

The City Council hasn't appointed a replacement for Etheridge. If an appointment is made, the appointed council member would serve until the March city election. The person elected in March would serve two years.