

COMMISSIONERS' PROCEEDINGS
SPECIAL MEETING
JANUARY 29, 2024

Agenda: 8:30 AM – Gene's Heartland Foods regarding new grocery store

The Board of Stevens County Commissioners met for a special session. Present were all members: Pat Hall, Tron Stegman, and Joe D Thompson. Also present was County Attorney, Paul Kitzke; Amy Rich, Deputy County Clerk; RoGlenda Coulter from the Hugoton Hermes; Jeff Charbonneau, James Clasen, and Justin Renz with Gene's Heartland Foods. Stevens County residents who attended were Estella Beesley, Walter Beesley, Jim Ghumm, Kim Harper, Debra Kallenbach, Matthew Lewis, Dennis Moore, Matthew Rome, Thea Schnittker, Matt Willis, Jill Wolters, and Nate Wolters.

Tron called the meeting to order.

Tron asked the Heartland Food representatives to give an update on their plans for the grocery store. The gentlemen are with the Gene's Heartland Foods chain and Justin Renz will serve as the future manager for the Hugoton store. James Clasen spoke for the group, stating the original negotiations were done in October of 2023 and they had planned to open the store the first Sunday after Thanksgiving in November of 2023.

He explained that the delay in opening was due to waiting on the bank to have full control. He talked about the hack into the electronic filing system of the state of Kansas courts back in October of 2023, and Heartland not being able to get a clear title opinion for the property. He reported the bank now has full control.

Thea asked if they knew if the title company is still requiring exceptions and waivers to be signed for contract completion.

Paul stated new cases cannot be digitally filed yet through Eflex (the court's electronic filing system), but as far as he knew, everything else was back on track as of the prior week.

When asked about an updated timeline, James replied, they are being told their bank is working with Jeremiah Johnson and should have a clear title in about two (2) weeks and then they can have inventory stocked by the end of February. James said their warehouse is in Amarillo and they work very nicely together. He relayed that there will be many trucks coming in with product, and it takes one and one half (1 ½) weeks to two (2) weeks to stock the size of this location.

Paul asked some questions regarding the store model and employment numbers.

James stated they have different models for their varying store locations, depending on the needs of the community. He said after researching Stevens County they will stick to a traditional supermarket model for now that will include a deli and catering services.

Justin replied he had held interviews and about 20 to 30 people were lined up to start work back in November. He said this size store with a deli could employ 35 to 45 people, and one obstacle they have encountered for this location has been finding a meat cutter.

The electricity in the building was the next topic of conversation. James relayed that it had been shut off just prior to the below freezing temperatures. Pat wondered about perishable food items being left in the store. James replied it had all been previously removed, and Heartland has a refrigeration

specialist coming to inspect all the equipment. Debra informed them that when the store was previously in operation, there were leaks in the building and puddles of water on the floor whenever it rained.

The gentleman shared some information about their past work experience and where the other Gene's Heartland Grocery store locations are in Kansas.

The commissioners thanked them for coming in and Joe invited them to ask if they needed anything and the commissioners will do their best to help in any way or point them in the right direction. Matthew Rome was introduced to them as the new city mayor and was instructed to contact him if anything arises that is a city matter.

By motion, the Board adjourned.

Attest: Amy Rich, Deputy County Clerk

Tron Stegman, Chairman