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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

The Seward County Commission's leadership changed slightly Monday night.

After commission chairman Ada Linenbroker called for nominations for head of the board, commissioner Jim Rice nominated her for the position with commissioner C.J. Wettstein seconding the motion. After commissioner Randy Malin moved that nominations cease, the board then voted unanimously to allow Linenbroker to remain chairman.



Linenbroker then called for nominations for the vice chairman position on the board. Rice nominated Wettstein to take over the seat held by commissioner Doug LaFreniere.

LaFreniere seconded the motion, and Malin moved that nominations cease. The commission voted unanimously to make Wettstein the new vice chairman.

Later in the meeting, commissioners went into an executive session to discuss legal matters pertaining the sale of real estate owned by the county to Southwest Housing LLC.

According to paperwork obtained from county administrator April Warden, the land is located in the Doll Addition of Holiday Estates.

Following the executive session, Wettstein made a motion to amend a contract the commission had approved with Southwest Housing originally passed Oct. 21, 2013.

After the motion was made, Rice spoke briefly about the move to bring in more local housing.

“Are we a business friendly county and city?” he said. “Do we encourage growth and development? On this transaction we are about to consider, what have we done to encourage growth and development?”

Rice said he is concerned about what not taking action would mean for further growth in Seward County.



“What will these developers tell others about their experience as a result of the action?” he said. “Did we overlook or even consider the possibility of additional business and industry coming to our city and county as a result of the additional and much needed home construction?”

The Southwest Housing purchase could result in as many as 65 new homes in Seward County, and Rice questioned whether the commission prior to Monday had been looking only at

protecting its own interests in land that he claimed had little or no value or development interest for nearly 40 years.

“The real land value may not be what we think or what we hoped,” he said. “Did we consider the needs, the capability and the consequences of and to the developer prior to making our demand to build so many houses within the first year?”

Rice said that because the county had been looking in that direction, much time and resources could have been wasted when property tax revenue had been collected from new housing.

“What have we gained, and what have we really proved?” he said. “For one thing, we did not prove that we are friendly and inviting building community.”

The original contract had required Southwest Housing to build a certain number of houses within a certain amount of time, and Rice concluded by saying that was a costly move on the county’s part.

“We have cost both the county and the developer additional time and expense simply because it sounded like a good idea to require a certain amount of structures to be built in a certain amount of time,” he said. “I believe it is time we take a look back and learn from our experience and hope we can do better next time.”

The commission then voted unanimously to approve the purchase contract between the county and Southwest Housing.

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