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document.getElementById('elastomer1706').style.display = get_style1706(); }
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By EARL WATT

- Daily Leader

It's not unusual for a business to have an antenna on the City of Liberal water tower.

What is out of the ordinary is for that antenna to not pay the city for the privilege for more than two years, according to city commissioner Larry Koochel.

"That money is used to paint the water tower so the taxpayers don't have to come up with the money themselves," Koochel said after he left a special meeting to discuss the issue between the City of Liberal Commission and Internet provider Southwest Kansas Online Monday evening.

Not only does the money raised from the antennas go toward the upkeep of the water tower, but the Liberal Country Club also receives a portion of the charge since the tower sits on country club property.

The new agreement that was being discussed called for a \$1,200 per month fee to begin immediately for SWKO, but Koochel said that the previous two-and-a-half years were being ignored.

"They knew for two-and-a-half years that they were on the water tower illegally and never contacted the city about getting a contract," Koochel said. "And then when they were sent a certified letter that gave them 30 days to come down to the city and get a contract drawn up, they didn't do it."

The issue came to a head last Thursday when the antenna had its power turned off by the city, and customers of SWKO no longer had Internet access.

“It’s no different than having your water turned off or electricity when you don’t pay,” Koochel said.

Customers started to call Koochel at home to ask why the city turned off SWKO’s antenna.

“I just explained to them that they had been on the tower for two-and-a-half years illegally,” Koochel said. “It wasn’t the city manager’s fault or city hall’s fault. SWKO had two-and-a-half years to get a contract and another 30 days after receiving a certified letter. They never responded.”

A motion was made at the special meeting to accept a contract for \$1,200 per month, but it would start now rather than going back two and a half years.

“What made me leave was a motion was made to approve a contract and there was no discussion outside of what I said,” Koochel said. “It was like nothing happened, like a brand new deal. I thought it was a bad business deal. I think there ought to be something for the two-and-a-half years that they used space on the water tower free of charge when everyone else pays \$1,200 per month for an antenna. It’s unfair to the other customers on the water tower and to the taxpayers.”

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