

# Council approves \$5.3 million construction contract for Hogadon Lodge

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*File, Star-Tribune*

*Patrons line up outside the lodge at Hogadon Ski Area during the first day of operation for season passes and lift tickets Dec. 10, 2011.*

The Hogadon supporters kept coming up to speak, and each time they were rewarded with smiles, nods and applause from the audience in City Hall.

Six members of the community spoke to Casper's City Council on Tuesday night in support of a new lodge at Hogadon Ski Area. While the city allocated \$6 million to the project last year, this week's vote by local leaders pushed forward an agreement with GH Phipps Construction of Wyoming. The contract is for about \$5.3 million.

The old lodge has a litany of problems, city officials said. City Manager V.H. McDonald said the old lodge's restrooms aren't up to par or accessible for disabled users. There isn't enough room for staff and equipment

rentals. The lodge has “questionable foundation stability” and can’t accommodate crowds. The kitchen’s too small. Food delivery is difficult.

The city found that the experience at the lodge kept people from returning to Hogadon, McDonald said. He also noted that the money being used for the new lodge was capital money, meaning that it could be used for one-time projects. The money was not coming from the city’s operating budget, which pays for the day-to-day work of the city.

The Council unanimously approved the lodge construction agreement.

Supporters spoke Tuesday night about what the new lodge would mean to them, their families and the community. While no one spoke against the lodge before the vote, one man approached the City Council to demonstrate how difficult the ski resort is for people with disabilities. Jonathan Taylor, a longtime Casper resident, said he was paralyzed in an accident 16 years ago. After the accident, he remembered telling himself that he would not let his situation keep him from doing the things he wanted to do, living the life he wanted to live. He was brought to tears as he talked about taking his kids up the mountain to ski, and then having to wave to them from the parking lot.

“I want to have those memories with my children,” he said. “I want to ski with them. I want to enjoy what it’s like to go down that hill with my children. Currently, I can’t do that.”

Longtime skier Bob Kidd talked about how he’s seen firsthand the decline of Hogadon. He’d said before that a new lodge was important to the community, and that for Casper, it was overdue.

“We have a real jewel up here,” Kidd said.

Bruce Lamberson, another supporter, said residents have rallied around the idea of a new lodge. One group of citizens created the Friends of Hogadon nonprofit, which has about \$25,000 to furnish the lodge.

“People will expect a finished building,” Lamberson said, referring to an earlier comment. “We’re not going to sit on the floor.”

After the supporters spoke, councilman Shawn Johnson said he’d first learned to ski in Montana. Back in Casper, he decided he would check out Hogadon and possibly ski more there. But as soon as he saw the state of the city ski area, he decided he wouldn’t go.

“I think this definitely would not only draw me, but others like me, who were deterred by the state of Hogadon,” Johnson said. “Once we get that place where it needs to be, I think we’ll see an influx of people.”

Before the Council voted, Mayor Daniel Sandoval smiled at the reactions from the audience. A past Council had allocated the money, and it was a change of pace for this many residents to support spending a large amount of money on a city project.

“We get the blame,” Sandoval said. “We might as well take the credit as well.”

*Follow local government reporter Hunter Woodall on Twitter @huntermw.*