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WTMPA sets 2019 deal to buy wind energy

Officials with the West Texas Municipal Power Agency announced a deal Monday that would provide Brownfield and three other South Plains cities with up to 12 percent of their energy needs through wind power and nearly set for 2019, but many details, including the cost of the deal, remain secret -- and that won't change soon.

The deal with Florida-based Nextera Energy Resources to purchase power from a wind farm near southwestern Oklahoma's Elk City would provide WTMPA's member cities -- Brownfield, Lubbock, Floydada and Tulia -- with up to 100 megawatts of energy beginning in 2019, when the agency's purchased-power contract with Xcel Energy expires.

The deal was announced at a press conference Monday afternoon at Lubbock City Hall.

City Manager Eldon Jobe, one of Brownfield's two representatives on the WTMPA board said the agency cannot release the cost the cities will pay for the power is flowing in 2019.

The secrecy, Jobe said, will protect Nextera's ability to compete in the power market.

"A lot of what is in the contract is confidential until 2019," he told the *Brownfield News*. "I can say the price we negotiated is better than what we are paying for electricity now."

The price of purchased power sold by a utility is not a matter of open record because it is competitive in nature.

WTMPA currently pays about \$30 per megawatt hour, Jobe said.

In the proposed deal with Nextera Energy Resources, the agency would secure energy from the Elk City II wind farm in southwestern Oklahoma, a 48-turbine facility producing about 100 megawatts.

But even with the contract and press conference, it's not a done deal.

First, the Southwest Power Pool, a regional transmission organization that encompasses the South Plains and Texas Panhandle, must approve a transmission plan that would transport the power from the wind farm to the WTMPA member cities.

Power providers such as Nextera and purchasing agencies, such as WTMPA, are required to make a reservation through the power pool to use capacity on transmission lines, according to a SPP spokesman.

The process involves ensuring current transmission infrastructure has the capacity to transport the power, a process that can take months.

Carroll McDonald, a spokesman for the West Texas Municipal Power Agency, said the SPP's decision in the transmission will determine what, if any, costs the agency would need to incur for new transmission lines or upgrades to existing lines if additional infrastructure is deemed necessary.

Jobe said he believes the infrastructure is in place and will not require extensive construction, which should keep expenses minimal.

"This isn't an end point, but it's a great starting point for us," Jobe said. "We are still working to find a firm source of power, but this 10 percent of our portfolio at a very good price helps us to diversify. Pretty soon the federal government is going to mandate that a portion of every city's power be from renewable resources, so this puts us ahead of the curve."

WTMPA has been in negotiations with Nextera for several months.

The next step in acquiring the remaining 90 percent of WTMPA's energy needs will include a mix of purchasing power, as well as expanding the entity's generation capabilities, he said.

"There's a lot of work left to do before 2019," he said. "That will be here before you know it."



Hundreds of Brownfield residents enjoyed the holiday spirit and a table full of finger foods Tuesday afternoon at Lone Star State Bank's annual Christmas Open House. Wayland Sealy joined the crowd in filling his plate at the impressive spread put out by the bank's employees.

Commissioners deny sheriff's request 4-0

The Terry County Jail's staff vacation plan will remain unchanged, despite a request from the sheriff to allow accumulated time to carry toward the next year.

Commissioners voted 4-0 on Monday morning not to accept a recommendation by Sheriff Larry Gilbreath to extend up to two weeks of credited employee vacation days an additional year. Under his proposal, staff would no longer lose on Dec. 31 any unused vacation time they had accumulated during the past year. He recommended 80 hours as the maximum amount of vacation time that could carry over, rather than allowing more and more vacation days to accumulate indefinitely.

"It's not adding anything - it's time they've earned, and they're just postponing taking it," Gilbreath told the commissioners during their semi-monthly meeting.

For example, he said, one of the jail's administrative employees still had two weeks of unused vacation time that he would unlikely be able to use before the end of the year. And if other staff in similar positions all rushed to take theirs in the next few weeks before the chance expired Jan. 1, he added, the jail would suffer a staffing shortage.

"I've got people losing vacation, and I'd like to

help them out a little," Gilbreath said.

Precinct 4 Commissioner John Franks responded that the county should not be responsible for individual employees' failure to use all their vacation time.

"It's their choice that they're losing it," he said before he made the motion to deny the request.

Precinct 3 Commissioner Shorty Martinez questioned if unused vacation time could be paid instead of delayed.

County Auditor Jan Hudson responded that would not be financially feasible, particularly if a large number of staff selected that option.

Precinct 1 Commissioner Mike Swain seconded Franks' motion.

County Judge Butch Wagner described Gilbreath's recommendation as "an added benefit to the employees to help them if they need it," but did not vote on the matter.

Among other agenda items, the commissioners also agreed to purchase a new motor grader for Precinct 2 through the Texas Association of School Board's BuyBoard program.

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Suspect charged with felony assault

A local man was arrested Friday afternoon following a standoff with police and a dispute with a gun.

Rogelio Cerna, 58, is charged with aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, a second-degree felony.

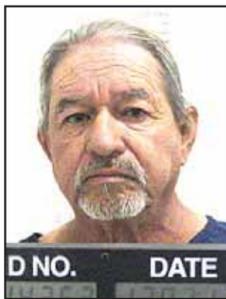
According to reports from the Brownfield Police Department, Cerna was carrying a handgun when he paid a visit to a neighbor in the 400 block of North Avenue A with whom he had recently had a financial dispute. Cerna eventually lost control of the weapon around the time that officers arrived on scene, but then fled down the street into his own home.

Police followed and attempted to subdue him, suspecting he was searching for another weapon. The suspect disobeyed officers' commands to surrender and refused to comply with arresting procedures until they deployed a Taser onto his person.

He was placed into custody at 4:21 p.m., then taken to the Terry County Jail. He was released Monday on a \$10,000 bond.

His intended victim, a 36-year-old male acquaintance, was unharmed.

If convicted, Cerna could face a prison sentence of two to 20 years.



Rogelio Cerna

Third suspect charged in vehicle burglary scheme

A third suspect in a series of vehicle burglaries about two months ago in southeast Brownfield was arrested Friday.

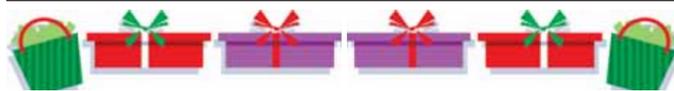
Niko Sifuentez, 19, is charged with theft of a firearm, debit or credit card abuse and engaging in organized criminal activity, all state jail felonies; and with two counts of burglary of a vehicle, a class A misdemeanor.

As the *Brownfield News* reported Oct. 30, codefendants Stephen Mendoza, 18, and Julian Martinez, 17, have already been arrested. The trio was implicated after Brownfield police received a series of vehicle-burglary reports Oct. 3 in East Reppto and surrounding streets.

The suspects were questioned and confessed. Meanwhile, detectives from the Brownfield Police Department's Criminal Investigation Division recovered most of the property stolen from the vehicles - including a gun and credit cards, the theft of which are felony offenses, regardless of their monetary value - and formed warrants for their arrest. Mendoza and Martinez turned themselves in shortly afterward.

Sifuentez turned himself in at the jail at 9:10 a.m. Friday. He remains behind bars as of press time with total bond for all charges set at \$22,500.

Mendoza and Martinez also both still remain in the facility in lieu of bonds of \$27,000 and \$11,500, respectively.



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