

City updated on soil removal, rail service

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Progress toward removal of contaminated soil at the Blackwell Zinc site drew the most attention during last night's City Commission meeting.

Jim Murray, a consultant with the Walt Shields PTI engineering firm, Denver, Colo., and currently working for Cyprus-AMEX, was in town to give an update on action at the site.

Both sides, at the city and state-federal level, appear to be pleased with how things are going, despite the occasional bureaucratic holdups.

Murray talked of a master plan devised in 1976, shortly after the smelter was vacated. He said the

plan was outdated, and needed to be clarified for the future.

"It's more and more of an issue to think about the future use of the site at the same time cleanup is being determined," said Murray. "Often times, there are opportunities to structure the cleanup in a way that particularly fits the future use of a site."

A master plan update would cost \$50,000, and the Environmental Protection Agency would supply their own contractor. The EPA and Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, according to Murray, have offered to supply the money.

So far, despite the best of intentions, a contractor hasn't been found. The EPA offered to have one

in tow by April, but have since been forced to push that back until the beginning of July.

Murray said it hasn't happened yet, but should "any day."

"They (EPA) are much more comfortable being a regulatory agency," Murray said. "One the one hand, they are trying to do the right thing for Blackwell ... and we've been patient with them."

The contractor would take about three months to come up with a revised plan, and Murray would like to see that plan in a map form, which anyone could look at, and which the Blackwell Industrial Authority could use in promoting growth in the area.

City Commissioner Rick Ireland posed the only question to Murray,

asking if the EPA couldn't find the contractors by a certain date, could Blackwell search on their own?

Murray assured Ireland that the EPA had good intentions, and despite that, sometimes things get slowed down.

City Manager Bob Annis agreed, noting how long it has took the state to give the go-ahead to pool repairs at Legion Pool.

Ideally, the "real work" would occur during late summer and early fall, with machinery being brought in next spring, with full soil remediation taking around two years.

The city would be able to take sections of land already remediated, and put them to use, rather than waiting for the entire project to be finished.

The city voted on only one manner of significance — a motion that, more or less, allows Blackwell to contribute in negotiations regarding the rail line, but doesn't provide for any money to go toward purchase.

City leaders agreed that language needs to be clarified to guarantee that Blackwell isn't getting the short end of the rail tie during these proceedings.

Until Blackwell provides an official written response, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation will not proceed any further with negotiations with the current owners of the rail line.

With Commissioner Richard Hicks on vacation, the commission voted 2-0 to send the official response.