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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2010

Projects get OK for 2012 funding

\$26.9 MILLION: Heating and cooling system for civic center among five projects to get approval.

The Rapid City Council signed off on Vision 2012 funding for five more projects Monday to little fanfare, bringing the total amount of committed funding to \$26.9 million.

Requests for a \$3,5 million up-grade to the heating and cooling system at the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, \$1.2 million expan-sion of Parkview Softball Com-plex, \$912,000 trail system for Skyline Wilderness Park and \$500,000 investments in both Black Hills Vision and a 24-hour

mental health crisis center all received final and unanimous approval.

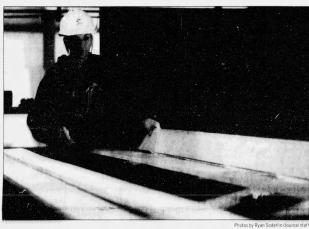
The five projects join seven thers that were approved for funding earlier this year, including Main Street Square, Rapid City Regional Airport terminal expansion and Canyon Lake dam rehabilitation.

With Monday's action, the approved projects will receive

their funding.
From the beginning, the city council has operated under the assumption that it would use a "pay as you go" model, instead of bonding, for the sales-tax-supported program. That means only \$6.5 million will be available for each of the next five years, for a total of \$3.2.6 million.
Council president Ron Kroeger said the city should have a schedule for funding finalized by the

end of the year.
Aldermen also heard presentations Monday from three of the
four groups that have yet to complete projects from the previous
round of Vision 2012. For the four
projects, the city has carried over
\$10.66 million above and beyond
the \$3.26 million awailable for the
new round of projects.
But Kroeger said if any of the

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Photos by Rya Jessica Miliken grades and inspects boards at Rushmore Forest Products, a sawmill near Hill City on Friday. The si cut boards to a thickness of one inch.

Local timber business feels weight of housing struggles

By Kevin Woster

When commercial forester Bill
Coburn ponders the state of the
Black Hills timber industry, he
doesn't just study the woods.
He also checks the value of
homes and the rate of foreclosures
across the nation.
Houses and timber naturally go
together. So do the number of new
housing starts and the price of
lumber across the nation.
And for the past few years,
housing starts a including singlet
and multi-family home units
have been down sharply, putting
weight on the national forest products industry, including those who
cut, transport and mill the timber
and refine the lumber i produces.

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Leon Gillespie works stacking pine paneling at Rushmore Forest Products. The paneling cut, planed, and milled at the sawmill and shipped to customers such as Menards.

Rapid City greenways hot spots for prostitution

DAILY ACTIVITY: Trial begins Thursday for 70-year-old accused of trying to buy sex.

By Andrea J. Cook

People buying and selling sex share the same pathways and parks frequented by Rapid City families. The worst of the bartering for sex happens in the busy greenways wedged between Omaha and New York streets, along East Boulevard, or closer to downtown where the city's homeless population tends to gather.

homeless population tends to gather.

"Those are the areas that have the highest volume of ac-tivity" police detective Sgt. Peter Ragnone said.

Those are also the areas targeted by Rapid City police stings designed to take the buyers off the street, thereby protecting desperate women willing to do anything for a

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Sting

The majority of the men arrested for arrested for soliciting sex during a sting are white males averaging 60 years old. But, their ages vary from 17 to 84 years old. Suspects are either arrested on the soot or interrested on the spot or inter-viewed and the information information handed on to the Pennington County State's Attorney's Of-fice for consid-eration by a grand jury.

Sen. Thune to back earmark moratorium

By Ledyard King

WASHINGTON — Sen. John Thune will join a growing number of Republican senators in calling for a two-year moratorium on earmarks, those congressional pet projects that became the target of anti-spending, tea party conservatives in congressional elections.

Last week, some Republican senators, including GOP Senate Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky, were defending the practice of earmarking as a way to make sure federal dollars go for important programs back home rather than letting government bureaucrats decide.

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WEATHER



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COMING TOMORROW



Dish that will bowl you over

Customers eating up Hot and Sour soup INDEX

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Black Hills State University

TIMBER: Nationally it remains a fragile market for houses.

"The benchmark is the housing starts," said Coburn, a procurement forester for Neiman Timber Co. in Spearfish. "This year you're looking at maybe 600,000 housing starts faitnionwide). And the lumber prices just follow the housing starts."

From a healthy annual housing start level of 1.5 million or more for much of the 1090s, housing soared to more than 2 million in 2005.

soared to more than 2 million in 2005.

"That was the top of the whole housing bubble," Coburn said.

The bubble shrunk to 1.3 million in 2007 and virtually popped after the 2008 financial meltdown that centered on the failure of mortgage-backed securities. Housing starts fell to 554,000 in 2009 but have shown a slight increase this fall, to an annually adjusted rate of about 600,000.

Nationally it remains a fragile market for houses, however, with concerns about another round of foreclosures that could mean more homes hitting the market, discouraging housing starts. Some of that has started already.

"As they're hitting the market, they're going to suck up a lot of pent-up demand," Coburn said.

That's the bad news. The good news, even in the face of economic challenges, is that the Black Hills has a relatively healthy forest products industry, especially when compared with other states. In addition, the Black Hills housing industry has escaped the worst of the national decline. And the biggest player in the forest products game in the Black Hills. Neiman, has shaped production at its sawmills in Hill City, Esperish and Hulett, Wyo., in ways that mitigate the impacts of the troubled housing industry nationally. The Neiman mills cut primarily i-inch lumber, much of which can be used in remodeling and related work. Harder-hit sawmill operations in other states tended to be 2-inch mills, which provide the studs and related products that are more directly reliant on new-home construction.

"Because the three Neiman mills in the Black Hills cut the 1-inch lumber, they are affected differently than a lot of the sawmills in the litermountain West," said Tom brough, director than a lot of the study and related products that are more directly reliant on new-home construction.

"Because the three Neiman mills."

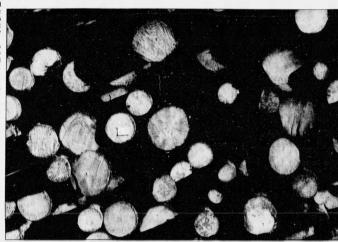
The some sample of something that shows up on local hardware store shelves.

"That's one example of something that has turned into a good product for them," Troxel said. All are part of a diversification to gua

rectly related to what Neiman produces. Troxel's association doesn't have an estimate on the economic impact of the forest product in-dustry on the Black Hills. But the impact from Neiman alone in the Spearfish area gives an idea of the overall value of the industry. Bryan Walker, director of the



Lance Pederson wraps a bundle of boards and readies them to be shipped Friday at Rusi set up to cut boards to the thickness of $1\,\mathrm{inch}$. ore Forest Products in Hill City, Rushmore Forest Products, a sa



Rushmore Forest Products cuts its boards from tim-ber in the Black Hills. Many of the logs that come from Black Hills National Forest

Spearfish Economic Development Corporation, said an analysis based on the Neiman payroll in Spearfish and other spending by the company put the economic impact at \$49.8 million a year.

"It's a very large part of our local economy." Walker said. "And it's probably a low number, given the fact that it doesn't include all the independent contractors that work in the area as a result of the production of lumber."

Despite the challenges in the industry, the future of that lumber production is promising overall, said Carroll Korb, president of Forest Products Distributors in Rapid City.

The operation is a wholesale lumber company with a remanufacturing plant, offering specialty treatment and modification of sawmill products.

The ponderosa pine trees that dominate the Black Hills are a desirable species in the industry, Korb said.

The wood has a strong place in the remodeling market, which helped prevent worse industry declines locally, he said.

Korb said the troubled lumber market nationally was the result of



ne-by-six-inch boards, measuring 10 feet

an "overbuild" in homes, many of which went to people who ended up not being able to afford them. That inventory must come down over the next year or two before

the lumber market can fully re-cover, he said. But he is optimistic that it will. "When the market comes back, you'll see an industry that is

more efficient. And it always comes back," he said. "I don't have any doubt that it'll come back." Contact Kevin Woster at 394-8413 or kevin.woster@rapidcityjournal.com

PROSTITUTION: Stings' goal is to reduce activity.

few dollars.

The strings can net as many as five offenders or come up empty handed, but the goal is always the same – reduce or eliminate the activity, while preserving some dignity for the women prostituting themselves, police Chief Steve Allender said.

"In reality they're break-ing the law, however, arrest-ing them is not going to have as good of a chance of curb-ing this behavior as arrest-ing the people using them;" Allender said.

The greater good is bet-ter served by holding the men buying sex accountable for taking advantage of homeless women, he said.

The buying and selling of

sexual favors is almost a daily activity, Ragnone said. And, it's not something that happens in the shadows and after dark.

"We're targeting the males who are targeting our female, mostly homeless, populations," Ragnone said.

"Some of these sexual acts are occurring in vehicles, in the park, in daytime hours when families and citizens are out in the bike path and parks," police Capt. Deb Cady said. "I don't think citizens should have to tolerate that."

Men Irying to buy sex have been known to approach women taking a walk through the park, Cady said. The majority of the men arrested for soliciting sex during a sting are white males averaging 60 years old. But, their ages vary from iry to 84 years old.

Infirmity doesn't exclude a potential buyer from being charged with the Class 1 misdemeanor of

hiring for sexual activity and conviction can result in a sentence of up to one year in jail and a \$2,000 fine.

Last March, police arrested Larry Langager, 70, of Rapid City for allegedly negotiating with a civilian informant. Langager, who is scheduled to go on trial Thursday, used a three-wheeled electric scooter to attend a court hearing Monday.

"Some of the women

attend a court hearing Monday.

"Some of the women that they are soliciting have alcohol addiction issues and are using that money to support their alcohol addiction," Cady said. "I view those women as potentially victims willing to do about anything to get money to continue drinking."

"From our experience, these are people who are desperate for money," Ragmone said. "They are most likely prostituting themselves to earn money for whatever their needs are: alcohol, drugs, food or

rent. They're in desperate

rent. They're in desperate situations."

Using a paid civilian informant and audio and video equipment, police conduct surveillance operations that can net them as many as five potential customers in one operation.

These are resource intensive operations that can ent them as many as five potential customers in one operation. These are resource intensive operations that tie up people and equipment for four or five-hour stretches, Ragnone said. Suspects are either arrested on the spot or interviewed and the information handed on to the Penning-ton County State's Attorney's Office for consideration by a grand jury.

The law doesn't discriminate because of age or degree of crime, Roetzel said.

"We can't pick and choose which crimes we will prosecute." Roetzel said.
"The community makes it well known that it doesn't like prostitution."

Ragnone does not have accurate figures on how

many arrests and prosecu-tions resulted from surveil-lance operations the past two years, but does know that the number of arrests went down this year. "We're doing this out of concern for the welfare of our people in desperate sit-uations, not to boost the number of misdemeanor arrests, Ragnone said. "The fewer (arrests) we make, the more successful we are."

Contact Andrea Cook at 394-8423 or



