SRO crowd supports street, alley closures

Whitney Benefits' request passed to second reading

By Pat Blair

Senior Staff reporter

About 100 Sheridan County residents crowded the City Council Chambers to show their support for Whitney Benefits' proposed ice facility and the organization's request that alleys and portions of streets in the area be closed.

Council members agreed with individuals who, in a public hearing, said safety and access concerns raised in recent weeks can be resolved and do not affect whether the city should vacate the alleys and streets.

No one spoke against the request Monday.

The Council gave unanimous first-reading approval to the ordinance vacating the alleys and portions of Grinnell Avenue and Custer Street around and within the proposed ice skating facility under construction at the intersection of Brundage Street and Sheridan Avenue.

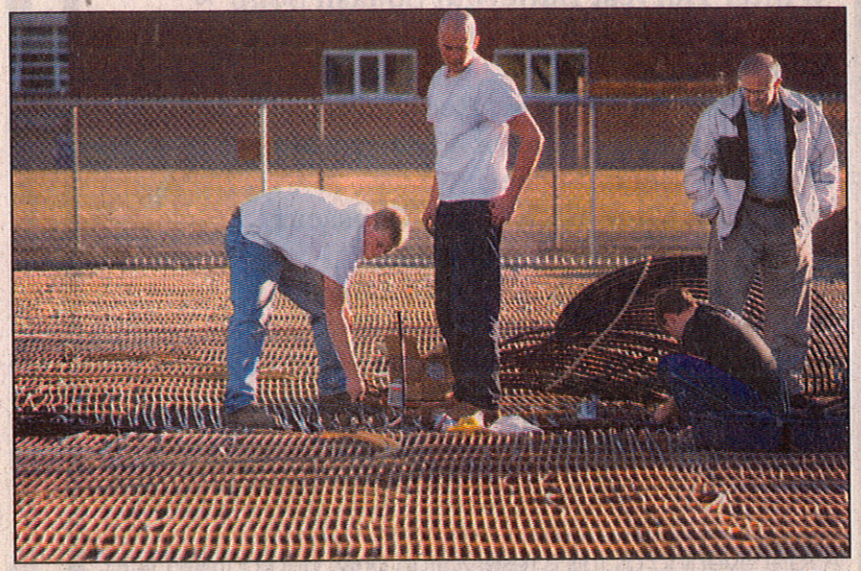
The ordinance also will zone the vacated areas M-1 industrial — the same zoning as most of the surrounding property.

Two more readings are required before the ordinance is adopted into city code.

The City Planning Commission at an Oct. 28 meeting recommended that the Council approve Whitney Benefits' request.

City staff in a memo presented this month to Mayor Jim Wilson and the Council made additional comments about concerns relating to safety of children being dropped off and picked up at the

Please see **Whitney, Page 8**



The Sheridan Press/Christopher Pfuhl

Ice rink progress continues as cooling lines are laid and connected Monday by staff of Burley's Rink Supply from Johnstown, Pa. From left are John Hicks, Dave Zedack, and Josh Cunningham. Standing at right is Johnny Knapp of TSP Engineering — the firm designing the facility. When completed, the plastic tubing will be filled with chemicals to freeze and maintain the thin layer of water forming the skating surface.

Sheridan Press 11/19/02

Whitney

(Continued from Page 1)

nk and access for fire apparatus to the facility.

Emergency Services Director Bob Symons wrote he had "some safety concerns with the potential of vehicle and pedestrian conflicts," and the memo from the city staff to the Council said the police department concurred.

Patrick Henderson, Whitney Benefits executive director, read a letter from Andy Hall, chairman of the Planning Commission, in which Hall wrote he was "greatly troubled" by what appeared to be "an attempt to impose conditions (on Whitney Benefits) at the 11th hour."

Hall wrote he had not been aware at the time of the plan board meeting that the police or fire departments had any concerns and said those issues are not part of the consideration in a request for street vacations.

"The only decision to be made" in a vacation, Hall wrote, "is if the city needs the street right of way."

Supporters of Whitney's request included Dennis Green, a trustee for Sheridan County School District 2 and member of the Sheridan Recreation District, who told the Council the recreation board favors Whitney Benefits' plans, and added, "We are 100 percent behind Whitney."

Whitney Benefits President Tom Kinnison said the nonprofit organization has purchased 18 separate parcels of property during the past year — "all with Whitney funds and all market transactions," he said.

He said Whitney Benefits owns the property on all sides of the alleys and streets the city is being asked to vacate.

The organization did send out notices of the request to 81 property owners in the area, Kinnison said. "I have visited most of the adjacent property owners and taken them out on a tour of the streets," he said.

Sheridan's City Planning Commission considered the request at its Oct. 28 meeting and unanimously recommended that the Council approve the request.

Kim Love, a trustee for Whitney Benefits, accused city staff and Sheridan Mayor Jim Wilson of trying to run the city independently of the City Council.

Love — referring to Symons' comments in a memo to Wilson, questioning whether the vacation would violate code with regard to fire apparatus access to the facility — asked, "Is there ever a time in history when a skating rink has broken out in fire?"

Symons did not mention rescue or emergency medical vehicles in his memo.