

Vowell faces charges for forgery, use of water pump

By Carole Cloudwalker, Cody Enterprise

Two felony and two misdemeanor charges were filed Friday against Mike Vowell, the former county Buildings and Grounds Superintendent.

He faces 22 years in prison and up to \$22,000 in fines on the charges.

They were filed in connection with an irrigation pump and pipe fittings Vowell allegedly ordered in the name of the county but then took home for his own use.

Vowell, who was arrested and taken to jail briefly just prior to his initial court appearance, is charged with two misdemeanor counts of wrongfully appropriating public property (the pump, pipe and fittings) and two felony counts of make writing that purports to be another's (i.e., forgery).

Charges were filed in Judge Bruce Waters circuit court.

A personal recognizance signature bond was set at \$15,000. Vowell was released after his initial court appearance without posting bond, on the promise he will appear for a preliminary hearing at 2:30 p.m. June 30.

Count one states that on April 18 he came into possession of property of the government, namely a blue Gould centrifugal pump. That charge is a misdemeanor.

Count two states that on May 14 Vowell signed the name of Larry Kight, a county employee under his supervision in the Buildings and Grounds Department, on an invoice at Ace Hardware, which is a felony.

Count three states on May 14 Vowell unlawfully came into possession of property of the government, namely PVC pipe and fittings ... (and) with intent temporarily to deprive the owner of its use and benefit, converted public property to his own use, which is a misdemeanor.

Count four states that Vowell on April 17 signed the name of another Buildings and Grounds employee, Bryan Frank, on a second Ace Hardware invoice billed to Park County for unspecified items, which is a felony.

The two felony charges each carry penalties of imprisonment for up to 10 years, fines of up to \$10,000, or both, according to court documents.

The misdemeanors carry penalties of imprisonment for up to one year each and fines of up to \$1,000 each.

An affidavit of probable cause states that Vowell submitted and signed a voucher for payment by Park County for a pump Vowell purchased through Grainger Industrial Supply, and that the pump was possibly being used personally by Vowell.

The affidavit states that Dennis Spargur, who also worked under Vowell, was told by Vowell that the pump was for use on Vowell's property.

Spargur later noticed a 3/4-horsepower centrifugal pump was sent to the Park County Complex by Grainger, and Spargur did not know of a project or application in Park County that required that type of pump.

He asked Vowell about the pump and Vowell told him it was for his (Mike Vowell's) irrigation on his property, court documents state.

Spargur then noticed the pump was gone and not in the Park County inventory, but he received the invoice from Grainger for the pump, including a three-year warranty, totalling \$431, according to the court

documents.

Spargur placed the invoice for the pump on Vowell's desk, believing the pump was for Vowell's personal use.

The documents state the county clerk's office received a voucher signed by Vowell requesting Grainger be paid \$431 for the pump for the Park County Complex, the document continues.

Park County paid the voucher.

On May 14 a search and seizure order was executed for Vowell's home in rural Park County and the pump was recovered.

Vowell admitted the pump was paid for by Park County, according to the affidavit of probable cause.

Vowell, who was terminated by the county, said at the time he was fired that he "borrowed" the pump for use at his home until he received his economic stimulus check and could purchase his own equipment.

At the time he said the pump was needed at the Park County Complex as backup for irrigating lawns from the ponds around the building.