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Doug Lewis, code enforcement for the city of Colby, looked at a boarded-up basement window on vacant house at 505 S. Lincoln. There is only plywood between the basement and the elements.

City cracks down on nuisances

By Patty Decker
Free Press Editor

Colby City Council approved taking further action to correct severe violations on property in the 500 block of South Lincoln at its meeting Tuesday.

Based on the recommendation by Doug Lewis, the city's code enforcement officer, the house at 505 S. Lincoln Ave. is a danger to the health, welfare and safety of residents in that neighborhood.

Lewis provided exterior photographs showing piles of trash, the unkempt lawn, untrimmed bushes, boarded up basement windows, wire panels laying loose in the yard and other miscellaneous items.

"The owner of the property, Michael D. Lewallen of Edson was also sent a certified letter with the same information you have in your packets," Lewis said.

In addition, Lewis said Lewallen is aware of the information because the certified receipt was signed.

Following the council's unanimous decision about the property, the city will begin steps, according to its ordinance, toward eliminating the nuisance problems at that location. Lewis said he sent the owner a notice of the council's decision and explained what options are available for correcting the situation.

"The owner will have 30 days to alleviate the exterior yard conditions; 60 days to alleviate the exterior structural conditions or 14 days to request a



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This empty house has structural problems and landscape conditions that forced city council to take action on the property owner.

hearing to appeal the determination," he said.

If the property owner does nothing, council can then pass a resolution authorizing the city to proceed with the abatement.

After the resolution is passed, the city would then take bids to demolish the structure and clean up the surroundings. The accrued costs would then be charged to the owner's property taxes.

The purpose of the ordinance is in protecting the public health and welfare, Lewis said.

"It's not healthy when neighbors see skunks, rats and other rodents running in and out of a house not occupied," he said.

Although Lewis was not sure how long the house has been vacant, he speculated it has been more than one year.

As for other properties in the city, Lewis said he sends out about 10 letters a week to repeat offenders or others not taking care of their lawns, weeds, or trash accumulations.

"Most people are good about taking care of the problem, but there are some who shouldn't have to be reminded more than twice," he said.

"It is the property owners responsibility to maintain their yard to the curb line and to the center of their alley," he said. "It's a never-ending battle."

For questions about the ordinance or what constitutes nuisances, call Lewis for assistance at 460-4410.

GOP candidate says tax break will aid economy

TOPEKA (AP) — Republican gubernatorial candidate Jim Barnett is calling for a temporary halt to the collection of unemployment taxes paid by employers in Kansas.

Barnett offered his proposal after state labor officials disclosed last week that the pool of money used to pay unemployment benefits was more than \$614 million. Barnett, an Emporia physician and state senator, said continued collection of the tax puts a burden on the economy.

He said the fund would more than cover any demands for benefits and was an example of Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' "mismanagement of the Kansas economy."

"If Kansas jobs had grown at the national average during the last four years, we would have 65,000 new jobs. Instead, under Kathleen Sebelius, our fragile economy is being taxed into extinction," Barnett said in a written statement.

Labor Secretary Jim Garner said Friday there were no plans to suspend collection of the unemployment tax, which was last halted by Gov. Bill Graves in the 1990s. Garner said an advisory panel for the trust fund would be taking a closer look at its resources and making recommendations to him and the governor.

On Tuesday, Sebelius said a growing trust fund indicates economic growth and fewer people seeking benefits.

"The last thing you want to do is deplete a fund, only to find out six or eight months from now that you're going to need it. I'm looking forward to getting that recommendation," from the advisory panel,

Sebelius said. "All signals are that we definitely have a growing economy."

Garner said the state has made steady economic progress since 2003, when the unemployment trust fund dwindled to \$217 million as 198,000 first-time jobless claims were filed with the state. Over the last year, claims have dropped 36 percent to 127,000 as more Kansans have gone back to work.

He said it would be a mistake to abate the tax, only to reinstate it during an economic downturn when businesses are facing limited resources.

Barnett has made the state's economic health a primary focus of his bid to unseat Sebelius in the November general election. He has criticized Sebelius for lack of leadership in getting the economy on track, including signing a \$541 million school finance package that Barnett says the state cannot afford without higher taxes.

He has proposed giving tax credits to businesses investing in Kansas to create more private-sector jobs, as well as reducing the state income tax rate and increasing the dependent exemption by \$500 to help families.

"An unemployment insurance tax abatement when the trust fund is brimming with money just makes sense," Barnett said.



J. Barnett

Board learns of contract rules

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

The Colby School Board learned of legalities of contract laws during its meeting Tuesday.

School district attorney John Gatz talked about how contracts should be offered and how the board should correctly terminate employment.

He said contracts continue from year to year for tenured teachers and administrators.

Tenured teachers are those who have worked for the school district at least three years.

When the board negotiates contracts, Gatz said extended contracts for tenured teachers are usually accepted.

But if the board decides not to renew a contract, it must give notice on or before May 1.

"In the notice, you've got to give reasons," Gatz said. "Non-tenured teachers aren't entitled to a hearing unless there is a civil rights violation involved."

For administrators other than superintendents, they are treated like tenured teachers. Those administrators include principals, curriculum director and activities director. Gatz said if the board doesn't give notice it is not renewing a contract, the contract would continue.

In other business, the board heard reports from the principals.

- Grade school Principal Terrell Harrison said preliminary enrollment numbers may hit 350 students, which would match last year.
- Middle school Principal Robb Ross said there were 218 students enrolled at his school as of Friday.
- The official enrollment count will be taken later this month.
- Diana Wieland, district curriculum director and principal of Thomas County Academy, said staff is reviewing the Average Yearly Progress data.

It is a report card of how the school is doing.

The board also approved the resignation of grade school paraprofessional Sherry White.

Sebelius, others, say Kansas making strides to improve security

TOPEKA (AP) — Flanked by state and local emergency responders, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius said Tuesday that Kansas had made great strides to protect residents from disasters — man-made and natural.

Sebelius signed a proclamation designating September as "Kansas Preparedness Month," urging residents to take their own steps to prepare for emergencies, such as preparing supplies and practicing plans for seeking shelter.

"Most disasters don't give us a lot of warning," Sebelius said.

The governor also signed the latest ver-



K. Sebelius

“There is a stark reminder that each and every day we need to do what we can at the state level to make sure that our citizens are safe . . .”

— Governor Kathleen Sebelius

sion of the state's emergency response plan, updated with new procedures for interaction with all levels of government. In marking the event, she noted that Tuesday's ceremony was sandwiched between last week's one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina slamming the Gulf Coast and the fifth anniversary next week of the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States.

"There is a stark reminder that each and

every day we need to do what we can at the state level to make sure that our citizens are safe and secure and we're prepared for any kind of event, even an attack by outside forces that we can't predict," Sebelius said. "What we can predict is that we live in a state where we have natural disasters."

Maj. Gen. Tod Bunting, state adjutant general, said the national disasters, as well as frequent tornadoes and snow storms seen

in Kansas, have prompted counties to focus their preparedness efforts. Much of the effort has been aimed at developing emergency plans, training key staff and using federal grants to boost resources.

"They've made great strides. Every one of the counties has a level of planning within the resources they have," Bunting said.

The state emergency management staff also includes regional planners who work with counties, Bunting said, while additional resources are available on the Internet.

Sen. Jay Emler, chairman of the Joint Committee on Kansas Security, said legislators would look at spending more money next year to continue funding regional emergency management coordinators. Those coordinators, currently funded with

federal resources, work directly with counties on preparedness issues as well as providing assistance during emergencies.

Emler, R-Lindsborg, said the greatest improvement in recent years has been enhancing emergency communications between first responders. Kansas has used state and federal dollars to improve radio capabilities, including establishing nine mobile teams that can deploy across the state to provide communication support between local and state responders.

Recently, a team from the federal Department of Homeland Security toured the Statehouse complex in downtown Topeka, which includes three state office buildings and the Kansas Judicial Center. Bunting said that review affirmed several measures put in place to provide security to the workers and visitors.