



Free Press Viewpoint

Colby has potential for great trail plan

Colby has an opportunity to tie the town together, get people outdoors to exercise and get some use out of its mostly ignored open spaces by building an absolutely incredible system of trails.

Because the city had the foresight to prevent development along the floodway, these areas remain open and inviting, forming a greenbelt from Range Avenue at Villa High Park in the southwest to the east side of town near the city ball fields.

This winding strip of mostly public land provides an opportunity to create a first-class path system that would appeal to today's physically active population. It'd draw hikers and walkers, runners, stroller-pushing parents, bikers, skaters and more, and the trails would see action during winter and summer.

These pathways also would serve as sidewalks connecting important points around town — from the high school to the courthouse to the ball fields.

Multiple-use trails in other Kansas towns, including Lindsborg and Goodland, are popular and well used. There's no reason to think Colby citizens wouldn't embrace them.

The main trail could run from Villa High Lake, connecting by sidewalks to the college campus and shopping areas on South Range, all the way to or near the ball diamonds. The right of way is mostly there.

Branches could run up the draw to the east side of the college, the new swimming pool, the high school and the proposed MAC center. The trails would pass through much of residential Colby, and the destinations would draw a lot of exercise-minded people, from students to seniors.

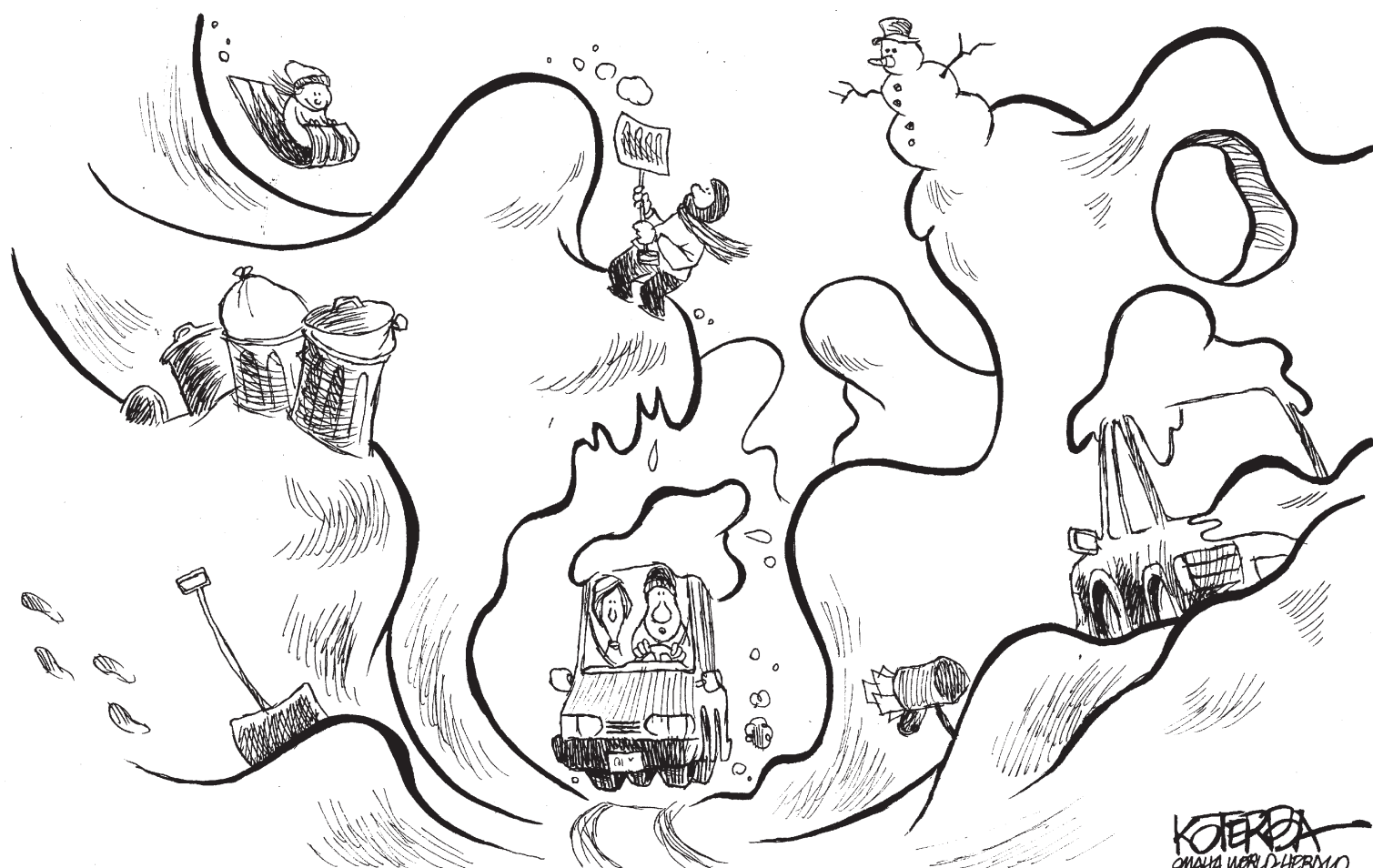
There would be issues to settle — street crossings, getting over or under the little-used railroad line to the old depot site, type of paving and safety at a major highway crossing. Those could be solved with careful design. With some state participation, perhaps an underpass could carry the trail safely under Fourth Street (U.S. 24) and, someday down the road, west under Range (K-25).

There's federal and state money for this kind of transportation project, especially if it's for multiple uses, and the city crew could do some of the work. The trails would tie in with new sidewalks the city is building and help connect the town for non-drivers, voluntary or otherwise.

In the summer, the trails would offer a shady way to get around the greenbelt, even if a few trees had to be planted. In the winter, they'd be a place to exercise and work out. All of the year, they'd be a civic asset, something for the town to be proud of and show visitors.

Costs, though not insignificant, should be minimal. The benefits would be great. So why not?

— Steve Haynes



"IT'S STARTING TO FEEL LIKE WE'VE SLIPPED INTO SOME WEIRD, DR. SEUSS PARALLEL UNIVERSE..."

Car breathes a sigh of relief at new year

My car is really, really glad that December is over.

My little white Solara had a bad month, but it had nothing to do with Christmas.

It started after the first big snowfall.

The roads were mostly clear, but it was dark and the temperature stood at 7 degrees as I left my job at the Pamida Pharmacy in Norton at 6:30 p.m.

I navigated out of the parking lot and headed west towards supper and my evening job of helping put together *The Oberlin Herald*.

About a mile past the last lights of Norton, I knew there was a problem. I suspected a flat front tire, so I pulled as far to the right as the snowy shoulder would allow.

My flashlight didn't have the best battery, but it showed that I was right. The right front tire was not going to take me to Oberlin — or even back to Norton.

I called for help, and two guardian angels arrived to get me back to the co-op service station in Norton and change my flat for the "donut" spare.

I drove home at 40 mph and was a little late for both supper and work. The car got two new



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

front tires.

Then came more snows, and as Christmas drew near, I decided I needed to empty my trunk of all the recyclables I store in there.

I fill paper grocery bags with glass, plastic, newspapers, magazines and chip board and then store them in the trunk of my car until it is full. Then it's time to go to the recycling center and unload.

Unfortunately, I didn't even get close.

The snow was too much for my little car. We got stuck at an intersection several blocks north of the center. I could back up a little, but I couldn't go very far forward. Using all my snow-driving tricks, I finally got the car headed back the way we came. We were still stuck and I was about to get out and try to find my

shovel under all the trash in my trunk when a city truck stopped and the driver got out and gave me a push. That little oomph got me and my trashy car on our way home.

Then the Monday after Christmas, I was on my way home from Norton again.

I saw them. I jammed on the brakes and moved to the right without jerking the wheel.

It was no use. Bambi ran right in front of me, and I bounced her into the left lane.

The housing around the left headlight was broken but the bulb miraculously was spared. Although the hood was slightly dented, the car was drivable. The deer didn't fare as well.

It's been too cold to worry about much more than getting where I have to go and getting home, so nothing has gotten fixed.

Still, it's not December anymore, and that's got to be good news for my poor little trashy, dented Solara.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Education issues top 2009

1 Economic downturn results in severe education cuts. Several midyear budget cuts by the Legislature and the governor slashed base state aid per pupil, leaving most schools owing more than the state will pay for the 2009-2010 school year. A loss of about \$500 million in Kansas property values likewise eroded school funding. Kansas schools dismissed more than 3,700 employees between spring and fall, cutting \$138 million in staff and programs.

2 Kansas' share of stimulus money "backfills" part of state revenue shortage. Over \$78 million in federal money was applied to Kansas public schools. Without this "stimulus," layoffs and program cuts would be about one-third more severe. But stimulus money is short term, and when it runs out, a "funding cliff" looms.

3 Consolidations accelerate. After remaining at 303 unified school districts for many years, small rural schools began consolidating at an increasing pace. Most districts voted to consolidate, but land transfers and disorganization were also used. Kansas is down to 293 USDs with several dozen more making inquiries to pursue consolidation.

4 Kansas loses Commissioner. Dr. Alexa Posny was nominated by President Obama to serve as assistant secretary of education for special education and rehabilitative services in Washington. After Senate confirmation, she assumed that post the last months of 2009. Dr. Diane DeBacker is interim commissioner until the state Board of Education selects a new commissioner.



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

5 Academic standards to be integrated with career and technical education. Although standards are for the most part on hold across the country, awaiting federal action on "common core" standards, the state board established the momentum to integrate future academic standards with career and technical education.

6 Teacher Leader endorsement. The board moved forward a "teacher leader" license endorsement to provide master teachers with an alternative to moving into administration.

7 Participation in "Common Core" standards. Initiated under Commissioner Posny, Kansas is part of the current effort to develop national standards for English, arts and mathematics. Final acceptance of these as state standards will have to be approved by the board, but the Kansas standards "are a very close match" with the national proposal.

8 Restricted license, alternative route, and endorsement-by-test-out teachers flood the field. 583 teachers added endorsements

by merely taking a test, and substantial numbers of new teachers entered under restricted licenses via "alternative" programs.

These procedures to "lower barriers to entering teaching" were implemented to address the teacher shortage before the economic downturn, a "shortage" that has temporarily gone away.

9 Former Topeka Mayor (1983-89) Doug Wright is denied teaching license. The state board rejected Mr. Wright's appeal in May and by a 6-4 vote, reinforced its decision by confirming findings of fact in December. While the board routinely makes decisions on revoking or denying teacher licenses in cases of felony convictions, these cases rarely draw public interest.

10 "Race to the Top" application prepared. Initiated by Posny, DeBacker is preparing an application to compete for the federal award (\$69 million to 175 million for Kansas).

Kansas schools must have signed on by the end-of-December, and this involves their buy-in to some sort of performance pay scheme. The state board will have to approve the application at its January meeting to make the first-round deadline.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72

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