



Free Press Viewpoint

Keep Council open

The appointment of former Councilman Phil DeYoung to the Colby City Council last week was a prime example of how not to go about things.

We have no quarrel with the choice of Councilman DeYoung. He had served well and honorably before, and Mayor Gary Adrian's stated goal was to bring some experience back onto the council as it faces some tough decisions.

Somewhere, though, the sense of involving the people of Colby in their democratic government got lost.

At a special meeting Tuesday, May 22, called on short notice to the council members, and virtually no notice to the citizens, the mayor announced the hiring of a council member as city public works director and his resignation from the elected post. He then appointed DeYoung to the council. After some heated discussion, he was approved on a 4-3 vote and sworn in.

More than a few people, including a vocal minority on the council, complained then and continue to complain about the speed and stealth of the council's action. They make some good points.

We can attribute some of this to Mayor Adrian's inexperience and perhaps some to a sense of naivete. But in a democratic system, it's important to let people know what's going on. That's especially true when you're filling an elective office, in essence, doing the voters' job for them between elections.

We feel, having talked with the mayor, that neither he nor anyone else intended to violate the state Open Meetings Act in calling the meeting or making the appointment. State law gives the mayor the duty to fill a council vacancy with an appointment until the next election, subject to a vote of the entire council.

However, the Open Meetings Act requires that the public — particularly those such as newspapers who have asked for written notice — must get advance warning of all meetings and the topics to be discussed. That apparently did not happen last week.

The mayor said he got an agenda the Thursday or Friday before the meeting. Some council members said they didn't get one until Monday. No announcement was made in advance about the resignation of Councilman Omar Weber to take the city job or any plans to replace him.

Outgoing City Manager Carolyn Armstrong took the blame for the Colby Free Press not being notified. She said she tried to fax the agenda to the paper, but found later that, in the absence of her secretary, she'd sent it to the library instead.

However, the paper did not get the usual e-mail notice of a special meeting either. And the mayor was going around that afternoon, telling people there would be a meeting, but the subject was "a secret."

What should have happened?

First of all, let everyone know. If a councilman is named to a city job, tell everyone. Make an announcement. If a councilman resigns, tell the whole town. Especially, tell the rest of the council. Copies of a complete agenda would have done this.

The mayor said he talked with a couple of council members for advice, but never shared his choice. That is OK. In fact, had he talked with a majority about the choice privately, he'd have been holding an illegal "serial" meeting forbidden by the Open Meetings Act.

The appointment itself could have been handled better. An announcement one week, giving anyone interested time to apply, then a decision and vote a week or two later would have sufficed to give all concerned their say. The mayor still has to make the decision, appointing whomever he thinks best.

Appointment of a replacement for an elected official cannot be discussed behind closed doors in Kansas. It does not fit the exemption for "nonelected personnel."

In any event, the cardinal rule, when handling public business, ought to be to bend over backward to be open and let everyone know what is going on.

There should be darned few secrets at City Hall, and choosing a council member cannot be one of them.

The town will judge this council, the administration and the new city manager by their openness and the way they inform the public going forward. What happened last week should be put to rest — but not forgotten.

— Steve Haynes

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They reside at attention in long straight lines on fields of grass without a blade out of place,



long forgotten and hidden from sight amongst the Oaks, Hickories and Wildflowers.



weatherworn on lonely hilltops,



Take time to search them out, for they all have stories they wish to share.



Growing vegetables an expensive hobby

Ah, the love of the outdoors.

The smell of newly mowed grass, the beauty of the trees and flowers and the birds at the feeders, all wonderful.

And the garden; I love my garden. I love planting and harvesting. I don't even mind watering and weeding.

I don't, however, feel that my garden is a money-saving exercise in grow-it-yourself vegetables.

In fact, it's sort of an expensive hobby. Not as expensive as skiing or growing hothouse orchids, but not as cheap as you might think, either.

It starts first thing in the spring with tilling. You need to hire someone to till your garden, you rent a rototiller or you get yours out of the garage and pay someone to repair it so you can get it running.

My favorite is to hire someone. One year, the guy we hired charged me \$50. This was a reasonable price, and what I had expected to pay. I wrote the check without another thought.

It was also a reasonable price to Steve, and when the guy asked him, he also paid \$50.

The last two years, Steve has rented a tiller and done it himself. That tends to be excruciating for all concerned, but it does work.

If you use raised planters, like our oldest daughter, the tilling has its own special problems, and you have to keep repairing or replac-



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

ing the planters. This year, she purchased four stock tanks to supplement her raised beds. At \$159 each, she'd better be using them for a long time. Then she went out and bought bags of gravel and soil to go in them. She's such a city girl now.

Once your garden is tilled, you get to start planting. Your choice is seeds or plants. I use a mixture.

I have no idea why, but I always buy plants for my tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, cabbage and cucumbers and I always get seeds for everything else — corn, peas, beans, squash, zucchini, turnips, carrots, beets and, this year, parsnips.

Once your plants and seeds are in the ground, you need to prop them up and protect them. For us, that means a three-foot fence all around the garden. Anything lower is an invitation for the dog to do high hurdles.

The fencing is \$12 to \$15 a section. The garden takes about five sections and it lasts about

four years. And, oh yes, it has to be special ordered.

Down in oldest daughter's garden in Augusta, Ga., her fence is five feet high with a trellised gate. I didn't even try to guess what all that cost, but it looks real nice and keeps her dogs, which are twice as big as mine, out of the vegetables.

Daughter says that she does save some money by starting most of her plants from seeds. She bought a \$100 seed starter just so she could, though she claims she only paid \$50 on eBay.

After tilling and planting, you have to weed and water. That's probably the cheapest part of the operation as long as you look at it as exercise and don't try to charge your normal hourly rate.

By the time you pick your vegetables, you can really enjoy your \$35 tomatoes and \$12 carrots, knowing that you are saving the planet, saving money and getting great exercise and a sunburn.

Enjoy!

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

Look for mixed results in wheat harvest

While combines began cutting in south-central Kansas counties at the end of last week, wheat harvest can't come soon enough for most farmers across the state. That's ironic, because this year's wheat crop already is two to three weeks early.

Dry heat, above-normal temperatures and winds that whipped what little moisture is left out of many wheat fields across the state have farmers roaring into harvest. While the general consensus among farmers is there'll still be wheat to harvest, the potential of what might have been looms large across the Kansas landscape.

Less than a month ago, the Wheat Quality Council tour estimated the 2012 crop to yield 403.8 million bushels. This figured out to be roughly 45 bushels per acre on the 9.5 million acres planted in Kansas. In three short weeks, dry weather dropped this estimate to a 365 million bushel crop.

On the other hand, there remain pockets of optimism across the state. Long-time Sumner County wheat farmer Scott Van Allen says it's been a long time since he's had a good wheat crop. He's been fortunate enough to have some rain.

"Our crop never really lacked for moisture like I've heard it has in other parts of the state," Van Allen says. "I've got my fingers crossed we could still have a very good crop."



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

That crop could yield 50 to 60 bushels-per-acre, weigh in at 60 pounds per bushel and contain a protein level in the mid to upper 11s, the Sumner County farmer says.

After attending a Kansas Wheat Commission meeting in Hays on May 18, Van Allen said, he took the southerly route home driving from Kinsley to Hutchison on U.S. 50. Here, he saw "some wheat hurting pretty badly. It was dry, heat-stressed and while there will still be wheat harvested, the yield potential got knocked down pretty hard."

Farther north and west of Salina, farmers also test cut some plots last week. In Phillips County, the crop is turning fast, and barring a slight chance of rains, harvest may be underway as you read this.

Veteran farmer Doug Zillinger says some of the crop still looks good while the nearly 100-degree heat and 50 mph winds last week are turning some of the grain white.

"It's sapping what little moisture the wheat

has left," Zillinger says. "The wheat condition is deteriorating every day."

The Kansas Agricultural Statistics Service downgraded its crop assessment on May 21. The agency rated the crop to 22 percent poor to very poor condition. Thirty-five percent was rated in fair shape, with 36 percent good and 7 percent excellent.

Wheat farmers know the crop is usually as good as it can be the first week in May. At this stage of maturity, with ideal weather, the crop can either maintain its current status, but if temperatures turn hot and the wind continues to blow, the crop deteriorates quickly.

Unfortunately, that's what happened this year. The wheat headed south beginning in early May.

The 2012 wheat crop will be a mixed bag for sure. Some farmers will have good yielding crops and others will not. Then everyone will begin to think and dream about the great crop next year.

Most farmers are realists. They understand whatever the yields wind up being when they haul the crop to the bin — that's what it'll be.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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