

from our viewpoint...

Oberlin steps back from wind deal

Oberlin's City Council has washed its hands of a proposed wind power deal, which hasn't blown anyone much good out here.

It's hard to fault the council members, who are charged with making some big decisions on the town's future. The vote upset the wind firm's principals, who now are 0-for-3 with northwest Kansas towns, already having "nos" from St. Francis and Sharon Springs.

Council members asked why they should sign a contract to pay more for power down the road than the city pays today for its most expensive source, Sunflower Electric Power Co. out of Hays. The Sunflower Wind people really didn't come up with a good answer for that, at least not that we heard.

The city also had doubts about the firm's lack of experience and financing, with several council members complaining that they'd never even seen a balance sheet. That's information the company didn't have to provide, but the lack of transparency didn't help the company sell anything.

Sunflower Wind did present a reasonable plan to build wind farms and to build the equipment to stock them. Whether that would have been self-sustaining was a valid question, and a difficult one to answer.

Investors, too, shied away from the firm, which is more of an idea than an operation at this point. It would have helped to have a power contract or two to show them, and the firm pushed the cities — maybe a little hard.

Sunflower Wind bent over backwards to please Oberlin, rewriting its proposal several times to try to make it more attractive. The company at first wanted the city to dump its current suppliers as soon as the wind farm was ready, but the city didn't have much incentive to do that and the council wasn't buying it.

The final version contained a "reverse bidding" process provision that no one really explained well. It didn't, apparently, give the council any reason to go with the proposal, though the firm said it was designed to protect the city from paying too much.

The sales proposition wasn't there, in the final analysis, and the council at large remained unconvinced that the deal was in the city's best interests. An outside consultant recommended against it, too. And if they felt that way, the members really had to vote no.

Their vote probably won't set too well with the Sunflower Wind people, who have blamed nearly everyone, including the Oberlin newspaper, for their problems selling the plan. One principal complained that he had been told no action would be taken at the meeting last week, but it looks like the council, hearing that its consultant wasn't going to recommend signing a contract, was just tired of fooling with the issue.

The firm did leave things on friendly terms, saying it would be ready to serve Oberlin when Oberlin was ready. Maybe that time will come. Sunflower announced last week it was buying a building in Hutchinson to begin building European-designed wind turbines.

When the company has more than ideas to sell, the city just might be willing to listen. The terms might not be as attractive then, or they might be better. Everyone would like to be using "green" power, though the federal hydro power the city gets is about as green as it comes.

Only time will tell on that part. — Steve Haynes



Thoughts about our old oak table

Ode to an oak table.

No don't worry, I'm not going to write a poem. I'm just going to reminisce about an old friend.

I grew up in Concordia. My family moved to 522 East Sixth Street in 1954, just before my sister was born. I was 6. That's when the old oak table came into our lives.

I always thought it came with the house, but mother told me that they bought it for about \$10. After that, it was in our living-dining room for most of my childhood.

We didn't eat at the table except on rare occasions, even on holidays. My grandparents lived a block and a half to the north and we spent most holidays with them. That big old oak table was only used when we had a lot of company at our house, which was rare.

Most of the time, it held books, papers and homework.

It was at that table that I did my nightly homework and my mother, a teacher, graded her papers. When my sister was old enough, we sat together and did homework and later, when I was older, I helped mother grade papers.

When I was in high school, my parents remodeled and there was no room for the big old table, so it was relegated to the basement, where it served as a handy flat surface for out-of-season Christmas decorations and a storage place for old books and papers.

When bad weather approached, it became our sturdy shelter to hide under in case the house decided to take off or fall in.

Steve and I had been married three years when we bought our first house. This was not a starter home. It was a five-bedroom brick



cynthia haynes

• open season

house in an older neighborhood in Kansas City. We were able to afford it because no one wanted to live in the inner city. We had a huge house and very little furniture.

My parents offered us the table, and we snatched it up.

We had the old table, with its fluted legs, stripped and then painstakingly refinished it by hand. It took a place of pride under the silver chandelier in the formal dining room. Steve's aunt donated a set of antique chairs his grandmother had owned, and we were set.

When we moved to Colorado, we took our table and put it at one end of our living-dining room.

Unlike my parents, we used our table for supper every night. Over the next 18 years, my children — with some help from the dry Colorado weather — proceeded to destroy the antique chairs and hide their gum under the table, but the old oak beauty held out.

After supper, the dishes were cleared and the homework came out. While Steve edited copy for the paper, the kids studied and I did whatever needed to be done around the house.

Over the years, we spent a lot of time at that old table.

It was where the children and I created gingerbread houses during the holidays, made pies and art projects. It's where Steve and I sweated over the figures on the newspapers we wanted

to buy — could we afford them, would they make cash flow, where did this old dried gum come from?

It's where I served the recipes I was testing for the food column I did every week. It was where I served family favorites like "chicken goodie," spinach-stuffed manicotti and swiss steak.

It was where I served my famous green eggs, a recipe using spinach and leftover Easter eggs. The children wouldn't eat it. Steve wouldn't eat it. Even the dogs wouldn't eat it. It didn't make the column, but won't ever be forgotten.

After we moved back to Kansas, the table moved into our dining room. We still eat at it every night and it's still covered with paperwork, just like in my parents' day.

There were four of us when we moved, and the table was our family place. Since there are just two of us now, we eat at one end and the paperwork is pushed to the other during supper. Then after the dishes are taken back to the kitchen, we bring out our laptop computers and start our homework.

Sometimes we have company meetings there. Other days, guests for dinner, or holiday meals with real silver and china.

Little has really changed for the old table, really.

It still stands there, a beautiful golden sheet of oak with four leaves ready, to put on a formal dinner for 12 or store used gum for three lively youngsters.

Hopefully, it'll get a chance to do both again in the future.

But for today, "Move the computers, dear, I'm serving chicken goodie tonight."

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100 years is enough for me, pal

Ah, the New Year is upon us, a time to make predictions about the future. Here's one that has me worried: human beings may eventually live a really long time.

According to the World Future Society, we are in the early phases of a superlongevity revolution. Thanks to advances nanotechnology and cell and gene manipulation, scientists may eventually learn how to keep humans alive from 120 to 500 years.

Which prompts an important question: Do we really want to live that long?

Sure a longer life would have its upside. I'd love to have my parents around forever. I'd love to swing by for Sunday dinner for at least 100 years more.

It would be great if we were able to keep fellows like Jimmy Stewart, Johnny Carson and Dean Martin around.

It would be even better if we were able to keep around great minds, such as Einstein, who could unlock the mysteries of the universe.

But a longer life would have its downside. Do we really want baby boomers, who are now beginning to retire, to vote government benefits for themselves for several hundred years?

And what of our younger generations, kids who are notorious slackers? Mother to son in year 2075: You're 100 years old! Isn't it time you move out and get a job!

I'm 45 and already showing signs of fatigue. In my experience, life is largely made up of colds, bills, speeding tickets and people who let you down. These experiences are connected together by a series of mundane tasks. The drudgeries are occasionally interrupted by a wonderful meal, a really good laugh or a romantic evening with a lovely woman.

Then the mundane stuff starts all over again.

If we live 100 years or more, how are we going to pay for it? Living is expensive. Are we going to work 50 years, retire, burn through our nest egg, then sling hamburgers for a century or two?



tom purcell

• commentary

On one hand, I think it's great we humans are getting better at improving our health and life spans. But on the other hand I know this: DYING is what makes life most worth living.

Would you enjoy a movie if you knew it was going to play for 24 hours? No, what makes the movie enjoyable is its ending. And it better end within two hours or we all start squirming in our seats.

The key to human happiness, you see, is not an abundance of a thing, but the lack of it. Doesn't pie taste better when we know it's the last slice? Doesn't a football game capture our attention more when it is the last of the season -- the one that determines who goes out the winner and who goes out the loser? Isn't

a comedian funnier when he exits the stage BEFORE we want him to go?

Hey, futurists, I'm not sure we want to stick around too long. If you believe in God, as I do, this is just a testing ground anyhow. This is just practice. It's like two-a-day football drills. We must first prove ourselves during the agony of summer practice to earn our rights to play in the big game. Do we really want to spend 500 hundred years running wind-sprints in summer practice?

When I look up to the stars, I can't help but sense there are better places to go. But it's not until we check out of Hotel Earth that we're able to enjoy a place with more amenities and better service. My religion says that place is Heaven, which I figure I'll get to sooner or later -- after doing a tour of that other place.

Though I don't think Purgatory will be so bad. Most of my friends will be there.

Tom Purcell is a nationally syndicated humor columnist. For comments to Tom, please email him at Purcell@caglecartoons.com.

