

from our viewpoint...

Air permit hearing; time to be counted

It has been a classic case of hurry up and wait for the investors in the Goodland Energy Center as they waited for the state Health Department to process their environmental paperwork. It is taking a bit longer than the center had hoped when the new plants were announced in July, but the wheels are turning — finally. Both Ron Pickman, chief operating officer of the Goodland Energy Center, with the power plant and the ethanol plant, and Mark Justus, manager of ReNewable Energy Resources, which is an investor in the project and handling biodiesel plant construction, are confident the project is moving ahead. They say construction should begin as soon as the state permits are received.

A hearing on the air quality permit for the coal-fired power plant is to be held at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 8, upstairs at the City Administration Building, 204 W. 11th.

In the next three weeks, people who want to express their support for the power plant and those who have objections should send a request to the department in care of Christy Thurman at 1000 SW Jackson, Suite 310, Topeka, Kan., or by fax to (785) 291-3953 by noon on Tuesday, Feb. 7.

Thurman said last week that the permit engineer handling the hearing is interested in hearing both those in support and those opposed to the power plant project.

Once the hearing is over, it will be a couple of weeks before a decision is handed down. Supporters of the power plant expect the state to be on their side and issue the permit without further delay. We are sure those who feel the plant is a mistake will be trying to get the state to delay the permit and to find problems with the design. That could make it harder to build the plant at the proposed site.

There is no secret that we favor the building of the power plant and the development of the entire energy center. Watching the price of gas for our cars and the cost of heating our homes continue to rise, the idea of having some local control over energy costs is appealing.

Developing a new source of reliable power is one of the keys to the economic future of the city and county. With the announcement of the new plants, there is a new sense of purpose and enthusiasm that can be seen in people and heard in their confidence that things are getting better.

A date for shipping of towers for ReNewable's proposed wind farm is good news as well, because it will supplement the city's power supply at a comparatively low price, whether most of the power is bought from Sunflower Electric's coal-fired power plants at Holcomb or from the new plant here.

It is good to see some work on the old Alco building on Main, but we would rather it had been a grocery or maybe had Penney's move into a larger building. Retailing is what drives a downtown, not office use.

The Baptists are pleased they will have a new location, however, and are starting to remodel. Having a church there is far better than having an empty, decaying building.

Harry Bishop came up with a special saying about Alco. He said it must be short for Always Loving Christ Outwardly. We welcome the activity downtown, and will be watching as the transformation continues.

Now if the Baptists' can conjure up some rain, that would be really a great miracle. — *Tom Betz*

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In appreciation of small towns

You don't have to be from a small town to know what one is like. Your stereotype is right: Old-timers gossip over morning coffee, and every person at the cafe knows you, and your dog, too.

Streets are nearly empty most nights, with only a few teenagers driving in circles until they finally accumulate enough velocity to spin out of town.

I was one of those teenagers. And my parents supported me. They thought staying would waste their hard work, my talent.

For the first time in my adolescence, I agreed with them. I would never get anywhere, I thought, if I stayed in the middle of nowhere.

I decided I would leave to have the freedom to make my own life, to escape the claustrophobia of a small place, to continue my education, so I could get a job.

Last summer, with my parents' encouragement, I studied writing at an institute in upstate New York. I did my best to hide my small-town past. I even tried to change the subject when people asked where I was from.

One writer was not diverted. "Rural America is dying," he said, "because creative young people like you leave."

This was obvious, but I had always thought it applied to someone else. My parents and my town, by believing my decision to leave inevitable, had in effect given me permission and absolved me of responsibility.

The problem is that small towns bank only



prairie writers circle

• aubrey streit

on potential, and simply pray that we will someday have a change of heart and return.

That won't be enough to save them. Small towns can't afford to wait. If small towns want to survive, they must both retain and attract young adults.

More parents must teach their children that there's no shame in the stereotype we rightfully perpetuate about small towns. In fact, the stereotype reveals the best things about small towns. Economically shaky or not, they're built on the bedrock of human nature.

Yes, small-town life can be riddled with painful gossip, but shared stories can also weave people and their lives together.

In small towns, people can seem nosy invaders of privacy, but sometimes this is simply unabashed concern. It's for better, not worse, that nothing and no one are forgotten.

There may be cracks in small-town sidewalks, but small-town students don't fall through them. Small class sizes allow teachers to give the personal attention that can truly keep a student from being left behind.

Some small towns are in the middle of nowhere. But that's really somewhere: "now"

Session starts with move into new office

This first week of the new session, we will move into our new offices, become reacquainted with one another, listen to the governor's State of the State report and prepare our committees.

I have about a dozen bills to help people and local governments in my district that must be "put into the hopper" — including one for Sherman County and Goodland for the special sales tax for road repair.

I intend to provide a weekly "summary" of what has taken place.

I have been moved to a new office — 143N — in the Capitol. My e-mail should be jmorriso@ink.org. If anyone sends me e-mail,



jim morrison

• capitol review

I am likely not to respond unless it is addressed there.

This session promises to be important to my district and I need people to know what is going on and to give me the feedback and assistance I believe will be needed to help us in northwest Kansas.

My contact information is: Topeka resi-

dence: (785) 271-7898; Capitol office: (785) 296-7676; Capitol messaging center to have a note sent to me via the state library network: (800) 432-3924 (website is skyways.lib.ks.us/kansas/KSL/).

My secretary is Gary Deeter. Gary, an ordained minister, a retired high school English teacher, auto mechanic and generally all around good guy, is my right hand man. He helps me a lot to keep sane during the session. He also is a great resource for information. If you need anything, please contact him.

We have great opportunities to make events at the Capitol this year work to our area's benefit. Have a great year.

where to write

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; web address — roberts.senate.gov

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521; web e-mail address — brownback.senate.gov/CMEmail.me

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; Fax (202) 225-5124 e-mail address — jerry.moran@mail.house.gov

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 124-N, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676; e-mail address — jmorriso@ink.org

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, Rm. 128-S, 300 SW 10th, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785-296-7399; e-mail address — ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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