

## Sewer rate hiked to put cash in reserve

**By KIMBERLY BRANDT**  
The Oberlin City Council decided Thursday to raise sewer rates so that the city can start building a reserve fund to help pay for the work that has to be done at the waste water treatment plant.

The council has been looking at increasing the rates in their last two meetings. City

Administrator Gary Shike had prepared a chart to show what the rates would have to be raised to put anywhere from \$25,000 to \$175,000 a year in a reserve fund.

The council decided to increase the rate from \$1.27 per 100 cubic feet of water to \$1.90 per 100 cubic feet. That would put \$75,000 away each year.

Councilman Ken Shobe said currently, the median charge for sewer customers is \$7.73. The median rate is in the middle of all the charges, he said; it isn't the highest nor is it the lowest.

Mr. Shike said he thought \$50,000 would be a good number to have in reserve. The blower at the plant costs \$18,000 to replace,

he said, which is a good chunk of money. Something like that can happen easily.

Councilman Jay Anderson said \$50,000 looks like a lot of money until you go to replace something at the plant. So far the city has been kind of limping along without a reserve fund.

Councilman Stan McEvoy asked what

the city would have to pay each year on a \$2 million project. Mayor Gary Walter said it would be \$123,000 a year for 30 years at 4 percent interest.

If the project is that big, said Mr. Shike, maybe there would be some grant money.

In order to pay debt service of \$125,000 (See SEWER on Page 10A)

## Herndon votes (once again) to consolidate

**By KIMBERLY BRANDT**  
After deciding not to consolidate with Atwood the night before, the Herndon School Board reversed itself and voted to consolidate at a joint meeting with the Atwood board Thursday night.

Representatives of both boards were to appear before the state Board of Education to ask for approval of the merger on Tuesday.

The Herndon board has approved the consolidation at a public meeting on Jan. 23.

After having second thoughts, the board called a special meeting last Wednesday night at which members signed a resolution to repeal the consolidation, despite the fact that it had already gone to the state. Board members said they wanted to explore all the options.

Atwood Superintendent Lee Tarrant said after the meeting in Herndon last Wednesday, a special joint meeting was set and the Herndon board was invited to Atwood.

He said Atwood Board Member Chris Schmidt led the meeting. The two boards talked about the options,

including consolidation, cooperative agreements and chartered schools. The conversation kept working its way back to consolidation, he said.

One of the Herndon board members asked for assurance that the grade school, kindergarten through sixth grade, would stay open in Herndon for four years. Mr. Tarrant said it was pointed out that the current boards couldn't make promises for future boards.

A transition board made up of members from both old districts will run the new district for two years. It will be made up of Atwood board members Mr. Schmidt, Kent Morgan, Pattie Wolters and Bill Beaugard, and Herndon board members Andy Green, Tom Kogl and Francis Wahrman. One of those board members said they could probably guarantee three years for the grade school.

The Atwood board decided to sign a memorandum of understanding that would leave the grade school in Herndon open for four (See HERNDON on Page 10A)

## People stick around for informal talk after special meeting

**By KIMBERLY BRANDT**  
When the Herndon School Board wouldn't answer questions or allow public discussion at a special meeting last Wednesday, around 100 citizens stayed for an informal public meeting.

Two pro-consolidation patrons asked for the meeting so people could talk and ask questions. The board had just voted to rescind a resolution to consolidate.

The meeting was set up with a volunteer mediator from the audience, who said the goal was to address whatever was bothering those in the audience. That way, he said, maybe the school board could come up with some answers.

Several board members decided to stay for the meeting.

Patrons asked what budget cuts the district was facing if it didn't consolidate. If consolidation happens, they were told, the budgets from the two districts would be locked in for four years regardless of whether enrollment went down. If consolidation didn't happen, said one pro-consolidation patron, Herndon would lose \$100,000 next year. Together in four years, it was projected the two districts would lose \$1.2 million.

Herndon Board President Pat Allen said consolidation is still on the table.

But if anything is to happen this year, it has to be decided before Tuesday, said one patron. That way, the issue gets on the April school election ballot so the budgets can be

locked in for the coming school year next year.

Another patron asked about the lack of a high school math teacher or physics teacher. She said the district wasn't providing the education the students need to survive.

Herndon is a drowning school, said one woman. How does a drowning school hang onto another drowning school and make it work? If consolidation does happen, will there be a good quality school? After the four locked-in budget years, what happens when the numbers are way down.

Atwood Superintendent Lee Tarrant said there aren't a lot of guarantees. In a consolidated district, students at both schools will receive the same education whether that means having teachers or kids travel back and forth or if it means something else being done.

A patron asked if there would just be one administrator. Mr. Tarrant said Atwood has three now and would probably stay with three.

If the districts consolidate, said one patron, and then in a few years there are businesses brought into town and the student enrollment numbers go up, is there a way to get the kids and the school back to Herndon? There could be something in the works by enrollment time next year that may bring more students in to the school, he said.

Another patron asked what would happen if the two districts consolidated and then the state didn't have (See PUBLIC on Page 10A)



## Speech tourney

**ADDING THINGS UP,** Rebekah Hasty and Greta Wendelin (above) tabulated the judges' scores during the Oberlin Invitational Speech Tournament at the high school Saturday. Timekeeper Karyn Jordan sat with a judge (right) waiting for the next speaker.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt



## Crowd will gather in Colby to pray for rain

**By TOM DREILING**  
The title of the event says it all: "Northwest Kansas Pray for Rain Rally."

The brainchild of Brewster area farmer Leonard Kinkade and his wife Zelma, the rally is scheduled for 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 22, at the 4-H Building on the Thomas County Fairgrounds.

"We hope to see people from all over northwest Kansas, from Trego County west to the Colorado line and north to Nebraska," Kinkade said. "Farmers, ranchers, ag and machinery people, clergy, town-folk — this first-ever Northwest Kansas Rally for Rain is for everyone."

"The purpose of this event is to

pray to the Lord to break this drought, which affects everyone. We need to get back to our normal rainfall. We need to speak directly to the Lord."

The rally, said Kinkade, will begin at 3 p.m. and conclude at 6 p.m.

"People can come and go as they need," he said. "We hope to have clergy say a few words, read scripture and lead us in prayer."

A large map will be posted in the building and each person on hand will be asked to take a pin and stick it in the location of their home.

"We will probably ask people to come down front, state their name and offer a prayer for rain," he said.

He said prayers will be offered for political leaders who have the influ-

ence to assist with the problems associated with the drought.

"We need to ask God to point them in the right direction," he said. "We need to break this drought.... It affects everyone.... If I get 2-3 inches of rain at my place (3 miles southwest of Brewster on the Thomas-Sherman County line) and nobody else gets any rain, only I benefit. The drought continues."

He stressed the need to ask the Lord to break the drought, which, he says, has driven some farmers and ranchers from their land.

"The drought is not just a rural problem," he said. "It is also felt in all our towns in northwest Kansas, too."

Kinkade said he has no idea as to

the reception his prayer rally will receive.

"This is the first time for such an event in such a wide area," he said. "We pray for rain in our churches, or we pray individually, but we need to bring all of us together in a common plea to our Lord."

Kinkade said he got the idea for the prayer rally some months ago while traveling and listening to the radio.

"They were talking about doing this, and that sparked my interest," he said. "I guess I am the person the Lord selected to carry out the project in northwest Kansas."

He asks that ministers ask their congregations to take part "in this show of unity" in Colby.

## Moran plans Norcatour visit

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran plans to be at the Cardinal Cafe Two in Norcatour from 10:15 to 11:15 a.m. Monday to visit with people from Decatur County.

Each year, Rep. Moran travels in his district on a listening tour, stopping in each county to talk to constituents.

## Council checks city drought plan

The Oberlin City Council received copies of the city's drought plan at their meeting Thursday night so they could review the process.

City Administrator Gary Shike said the council probably needed to look at the plan, which is being reviewed earlier this year because of the dry weather.

The plan says the water watch stage can be triggered by the city storage falling beneath 60 percent of capacity or if the demand of water for one day is more than 1.2 million

gallons. Mr. Shike said the city isn't using 1.2 million gallons a day, but storage is falling below 60 percent. The storage capacity is low because the biggest well is being repaired and isn't being used. The city isn't that far from a water watch, he said.

Mr. Shike said he has heard of communities that are already activating their water plans.

He said he is concerned about the city's water supply. The city wells tap shallow water, he said. That aquifer is more easily affected by

drought. The level in city wells has dropped two feet in the last year, said Mr. Shike.

If the water situation does get worse, people could have to start deciding whether to save their lawns or trees, said Mayor Gary Walter.

Mr. Shike said he talked to Scott Ross, water commissioner for this area with the Kansas Division of Water Resources, and he said he has heard in cities, they that are talking about using odd/even watering days like Oberlin did last summer.

## Council Roundup

At its meeting Thursday, the Oberlin City Council:

- Raised sewer rates to build a reserve to help pay for work at the treatment plant. Story at top of page.
- Talked about the importance of conserving water. Story to come.
- Decided to leave all the city buildings smoke free and let the city administrator, foreman and police chief work on a policy for vehicles. Story to come.
- Heard that a test well on land the

city bought this year has been delayed. Story to come.

- Found out that the city had enough money budgeted to pay for the 40 percent increase in employee medical insurance. Story on Page 3A.
- Declared two old patrol cars surplus property and sold them. Story on Page 3A.
- Looked at the city's drought emergency plan, which is reviewed annually. Story at left.

# \* Herndon reverses vote, then changes

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years and as long as it is economically feasible after that.

Mr. Tarrant said it is important to stress that consolidation doesn't mean the school is closing.

After the Herndon board talked with their attorney, Jerry Gasper of Topeka, they voted to rescind the resolution and consolidate with Atwood. The vote was 5 to 2 with Pat Allen and Jerry Niemeth voting against consolidation.

Since the Atwood board had voted 7-0 to consolidate during the Jan. 23 joint meeting, Mr. Tarrant said, there was no action for them to take.

"Whatever Herndon decides to do," said Mr. Tarrant, "we are here to help."

Mr. Tarrant said the resolution signed by Herndon last Wednesday to not consolidate had not been sent in to the state.

At 2:20 p.m. on Tuesday, the original signed resolutions were to be voted on by the state board of

education. Mr. Green, Mr. Schmidt and Mr. Morgan were planning to be at the meeting in case there are any questions, said Mr. Tarrant.

If the state board approves the merger, voters in Atwood and Herndon will make the decision in school elections on April 1.

"The toughest thing about this is that this is the first true consolidation in the last 20 years in Kansas," said Mr. Tarrant. "That makes it difficult to get information and to get accurate information."

It looks like there will be more consolidation in Kansas in the future, he added.

Mr. Tarrant said at the most there were 25 people at the Atwood meeting, mostly from the Herndon area.

If everything passes, he said, the district will be called the Rawlins County Unified School District, either number 105 or 106.

So far, he said, the understanding has been to keep the buffalo as the high school mascot, following the Atwood tradition.

# \* Public questions get few answers

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the money and a building would have to be closed to make things work.

No one can guarantee what the state is going to do, said Mr. Tarrant. The state is trying to get schools to consolidate, he said. There is a misconception that consolidation will close the school, he added, but that is up to the board.

Atwood is projected to lose between 15 to 18 students a year for two years, said Mr. Tarrant.

"Atwood needs Herndon as much as Herndon needs Atwood," he said.

Patrons asked for guarantees for keeping the school open in Herndon, while others wanted to hear about cooperative agreements or other options. There weren't many questions answered at the meeting.

One patron said he had been making contacts about a youth ranch being put in Herndon similar to the

one in Oberlin. The school educates the kids and gets money from the state for them. That money is then used to educate those kids.

People wanted to know what would happen to the town and the community if the kids were bussed to Atwood.

One patron, holding a piece of paper in his hand, said he thought the board and the superintendent were on two different tracks. He said he had an article from a regional paper in his hand that says the Herndon board would consolidate with Atwood. The article came out before the public meeting on Jan. 22 where the vote to consolidate happened. The man asked what was going on. He didn't get an answer.

Mr. Allen stressed that consolidation was still on the table. The group decided the meeting was over after a little over an hour of talking.

# Board backs out of deal in hasty special meeting

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The Herndon School Board voted last Wednesday night to rescind a resolution voted on at the end of January, which meant the district would not be consolidating with Atwood.

The special meeting brought a little over 100 people to the Herndon school gym, including three uniformed law enforcement officers. President Pat Allen said that the board would not answer questions from the public at the meeting.

Board President Pat Allen opened the meeting by saying that the board had called the meeting because they had received calls or been approached by voters to talk about the short time the board took to explore its options before deciding on the merger.

The board met with Atwood in December and then met with the Oberlin and Golden Plains boards in January. On Jan. 22, at the first town hall meeting, the board seemed reluctant, but voted to consolidate with Atwood.

Before the vote, though, a meeting had been set up with the Atwood board for the following night in which both boards voted to sign a resolution to go ahead with merger.

Mr. Allen said the Herndon board wanted to take time to explore other options and contact other resources. That didn't mean consolidation is out of the picture, he said.

Jan Katz Ackerman, reporter for *The Hays Daily News*, jumped to her feet and objected to the board tak-

ing any action at the meeting because the attorney who had been hired to write the resolution to rescind had not been hired by a majority of the board.

She said the action had to be taken by a quorum, a majority of the board, in public session and it hadn't been done that way. Mr. Allen said he thought the board needed to take a recess and contact Jerry Gasper, the board's attorney from Topeka.

Ms. Ackerman said she thought the call needed to be done in the public because the people have a right to know. Mr. Allen asked to get a phone hooked up in the gym.

After 15 minutes, it was announced that a phone couldn't be hooked up in the gym. The board moved to an office.

Mr. Gasper basically said that although it wasn't illegal for one board member to hire an outside attorney, it isn't necessarily the right thing to do to take the public out of the picture.

The only thing the board had to do was decide whether to adopt the resolution written by Dodge City Attorney Ken Strobel, who had been hired independently by Board Member David Ketterl. The board voted to adopt that resolution, rescinding the resolution to consolidate with Atwood.

A pro-consolidation patron asked if a public meeting could be held in the gym after the board meeting to discuss options. The board agreed the people could use the facility and adjourned its meeting.



## Putting pen to work

**WORKING ON** line drawings on Monday, fifth graders Kirsten Haas (top) and Justin Williams (below) are part of Terri Woolsey's elementary art classes.

—Staff photo by Kimberly Brandt



# \* Sewer expense to go up

(Continued from Page 1A)  
a year, he said, the city would basically have to double the rate now.

To meet new federal standards, said Mr. Monaco, work has to be started to remodel the sewer plant by December 2005 and finished two and a half years after that.

To save \$75,000 a year, said Councilman Jerry Fidele, that would mean a \$2.92 increase in the minimum charge increase and it would give the city \$225,000 in three years, which would be a good start on a \$2 million project. The median bill would see an increase of \$3.81. Mr. Fidele said it would be his recommendation to start a reserve fund with that increase. It would be better than doubling the current charge, he said.

Mayor Walter said he, too, was looking at a fund of \$75,000 but he said he didn't know if the community would like to see a \$100,000 fund, which would be a \$4.13 increase in the minimum bill and \$5.28 increase in the median.

The plant hasn't been remodeled since the late 1970s or early '80s, said Mr. Shike. It can't comply with new regulations from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Mr. Fidele made the motion to change the sewer rate to \$1.90 per 100 cubic feet, which would bring in a surplus of \$75,000 in a year. All councilman approved the increase.

Mr. Shobe said the city has to start somewhere. No matter where that is, it will be painful. At least this is less than the original \$125,000 the city had been talking about.

The crew will read water meters in March and figure new sewer bills based on water use over the winter. Customers will see the difference on their May bills.

## Museum has student art

The Dane G. Hansen Memorial Museum in Logan will hold its annual High School Art Exhibit from Feb. 28 to March 30.

Students from Norton, Palco, Smith Center, Logan, Phillipsburg, Hill City and Grainfield will be showing their work.

The show will include oil, water color, pen and ink, scratchboard, wood, weaving, ceramic and clay, wire sculpture, and other mediums. Hours are Monday-Friday, 9-noon and 1-4; Saturday, 9-noon and 1-5, and Sunday and holidays, 1-5 p.m.

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