

Contractor upset by idea that bills aren't being paid

At a recent Oberlin City Council meeting, a member reported complaints that businesses were not being paid promptly by J Corp, the company working on the city's water project, but the owner says bills are being paid as fast as possible.

Councilman Stan McEvoy said during the meeting March 13 that he had received a complaint that the company was behind on a bill at one local business. He said as he understood it, J Corp could charge up to a certain amount and then had to pay the bill.

Mr. McEvoy later said he didn't want to name the business.

Jeanette Pfannenstiel, owner of J Corp, said she thought she knew which supplier had complained, and wondered why the councilman would go public with the issue if he wasn't willing to name the source.

She said the payment process is a little complicated because it works through an escrow agent to protect the suppliers, but the bills are being paid.

Mr. McEvoy said he wanted to make sure that businesses in Oberlin are getting paid since the city has been paying J Corp. When a business says they aren't getting paid, he said, it concerns him. The city had questions in the beginning about hiring the company, he said, so he wanted to stay on top of things.

If the councilman has the right in a public meeting to say that a local business wasn't happy, said Ms. Pfannenstiel, then he should be able to give the name. She said she believes that the firm involved knows how the bills are paid.

J Corp doesn't want to cause any problems with any businesses, she said. The company does business in town and wants to continue doing that.

Some of the businesses J Corp uses in town are paid with a check right away, she said. For instance,

there is a subcontractor who has been doing the boring and he is paid directly, and to her knowledge there haven't been any problems.

J Corp uses an escrow service through a bonding company to pay some of the bills, she said. When the city writes a check to the company, it is sent to that service. J Corp then sends the bills to the escrow service to be paid.

The checks are sent back to J Corp for approval and then sent on to the suppliers the same day.

The second and third payments from the city arrived at the service at the same time, she said. The second payment was approved at the second meeting in the month instead of the first, which is when it is normally done. Then the third payment was approved at the first meeting in February.

When the city sends out a payment, she said, it has to go to Dallas, where the company waits three days to pay any bills until the check clears.

Getting both the payments at the same time may have delayed some of the bills, she said, but businesses here should have been paid by now.

J Corp spends a lot of money in Oberlin, she said, with employees eating at restaurants, staying in motels, buying gas and using businesses. The firm is making money, said Ms. Pfannenstiel, but a lot of it is being spent in Oberlin.

"We are keeping it local and giving it back to the community," she said. "The company wants to leave a good impression."

She added that she thinks the foreman is doing an excellent job working with people.

"We want the people in Oberlin to have a good impression of us," she said, "and in the future, if anything comes up, we want to be able to come back and don't want any hard feelings."



Supper has food and music

SERVING THE CHILI, high school student Nakita Graf helped the Jennings Lions Club at a soup supper on Saturday. The evening started out with your choice of potato soup or chili, crackers, celery, carrot and pepper sticks and pie or cake plus coffee or tea. After supper the crowd moved from the high school cafeteria to the gym, where they were entertained by The Bridge Band, including Troy Leiker on the flag guitar. Proceeds from the event will be used to send two students to Lions State Band Camp and Lions International Band Camp.

— Herald staff photos by Cynthia Haynes



District proposed to finance cemetery

The city of Oberlin has sent letters out to six township boards about forming a cemetery district which could set taxes to help pay to maintain the city cemetery.

Councilman Jay Anderson said Bassettville, Sappa, Logan, Liberty, Oberlin and parts of Center townships aren't part of any cemetery district, and the letters were sent to those boards.

The other townships, he said, have their own cemetery districts with country cemeteries in them.

Dr. Anderson said he will be beating the street soon to get a petition signed to start a cemetery district which will include Oberlin. If 51 percent of the eligible voters sign the petition, then a town hall meeting will be called and a cemetery board will be elected for the district.

That board will then meet with the City Council and a rural/city district would be formed. It would be run by a joint board between the elected board and the council. That is the way the Jennings district already

works, said Dr. Anderson.

The board then will set a tax levy for the district, taking some of the burden of cemetery maintenance off the city budget. That would mean that taxes could be raised in the district which includes the city and townships that would form the district.

Most of the people in the townships that don't have districts use the cemetery in Oberlin already, he said. This way, people would save money, because it costs more to be buried in a cemetery when you aren't a taxpayer of the district.

The money from the cemetery tax would be used for maintenance and beautification, which the board will be responsible for.

Dr. Anderson said he would like to see the new part of the city cemetery look more like the old part, with trees and grass. He said with the city budget being tight, the cemetery may be a place the city might make some cuts, and having a tax district might prevent that.

Youths steal car and gas while fleeing police

Three youths ran away from the Sappa Valley Youth Ranch late Saturday and apparently stole a car in Oberlin, fleeing to their hometowns of Garden City, Wichita and Topeka.

Oberlin Police Chief Wade Lockhart said two of the 16-year-old boys had been found in the Wichita area Sunday afternoon. The other 16-year-old, who was from Garden City, had not been captured as of Monday.

The boys apparently dropped the one youth off near Garden City, then drove on to Wichita. The stolen Jeep Cherokee was recovered on Sunday.

Staff at the ranch discovered the three boys missing at 12:05 a.m. Saturday. At 12:40 a.m., a call was placed to dispatch to notify the police, and eight minutes later, Officer Troy Haas was at the ranch to investigate.

Shortly afterward, dispatcher Bert Cool's voice came over the cable television announcing that

two black and one Hispanic youths had walked off from the ranch and could be in town.

Mr. Cool asked people to take their keys out of their cars and report any noises or dogs barking. He said the escapees were wearing gray sweat suits.

Chief Lockhart said before the staff calls police, they have to make sure the kids aren't on the campus, which is why it was 35 minutes before they were notified.

He said he goes to the ranch to find out any information the staff has and determine where the boys might be heading, what they are wearing and any other information.

The chief said Officer Haas found out that some of the kids had access to street clothes but the staff didn't know if they were in them. He also learned that one had received a phone call from a brother in the Topeka area.

Officers from the police department, sheriff's office, highway patrol and reserve deputies started a

long search of the town, checking the highways five to six miles out for any movement.

The search was continued until 4:05 a.m. Chief Lockhart said a little after 2 a.m., the officers started to talk about possibly someone coming in to pick up the boys. There had been no signs of the escapees anywhere, he said.

The next morning, Ray Kircher reported his 1995 Jeep Cherokee missing from Don Edgerton Repair, just east of town on U.S. 36.

That vehicle had been pulled over

in Jetmore around 4:30 a.m. for speeding and the occupants left without paying for gas in Dodge City at 3:15 p.m. When the gas skip happened, the chief said, there were only two youths in the car.

Since the boys are in custody of the Juvenile Justice Authority, case workers for each have been contacted and the boys who have been found are back in their custody.

Chief Lockhart said counties where the boys stole the car, the gas and got the speeding ticket may bring charges.



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