

City gets options for new sewer plant

The Oberlin City Council heard five options for a new waste water treatment plant, including two types of lagoons and three types of mechanical plants, but didn't make any decisions.

Reed Miller, with Miller and Associates, a McCook engineering firm, presented the options at a meeting Thursday, July 24.

Mr. Miller presented technical memorandums three and four in the plan. He said these are the meat of the study. The first and second memos outlined the standards a

plant must meet and the fifth is about disinfecting.

The average daily flow for the current waste water treatment plant is 210,000 gallons. The plants designs are set for either 300,000 or 450,000 gallons. He said one thing the council needs to decide is the size plant they want.

The options are a continuously discharging ponds, complete retention ponds, both passive systems, or an "oxidation ditch," sequencing batch reactor or a counter cur-

rent aeration, all involving some kind of mechanical treatment.

Out of the options, said Mr. Miller, the discharging lagoons have to meet requirements for the quality of water released from the plant, including standards for fecal coliform bacteria and ammonia. The holding ponds don't release any water.

The mechanical plants have to meet effluent standards for solids, ammonia, fecal coliform and chlorine, which is added to kill bacteria. Any mechanical plant must incor-

porate plans for future treatment requirements like phosphorus, Mr. Miller said.

The mechanical plants, said Mr. Miller, all need "influent headquarters" which include flow monitoring, mechanical fine screen and a grit removal unit. The plants also need an influent pump station, control building, ultraviolet disinfecting and chemical phosphorus removal with effluent filters.

The options would cost between \$2 million to \$3.5 million for 300,000 gallons a

day plant.

The lagoon systems would be similar, but the continuously discharging pond would be smaller, needing from 30 to 43 acres of water surface. The complete retention pond system would need from 78 to 118 acres of water surface.

In an oxidation ditch, he said, the water moves around a track for about a day, going through brushes and getting stirred up while oxygen is added.

(See SEWER on Page 8A)

Hurry! It's wet out here

A SHORT BUT HEAVY shower drenched Diane Specht (above) as she ran for cover downtown Monday afternoon. Even the canopies were no help in the wind-driven downpour. The streets (below) took on a rain-slick sheen and reflected the lights from cars and windows. There were reports of up to half an inch of badly needed rain.

— Herald staff photos by Cynthia Haynes



WATER PROJECT

Water focus shifts away from blending

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

Oberlin paid \$150,000 for a water mixing line that was supposed to add capacity to the city's overburdened system, but because of changes in federal regulations, it isn't being used to blend.

The line, which runs to wells east of town, was put into service last week to move water, replacing an old line along U.S. 36. It represents about 15 percent of the city's just-completed million-dollar water project.

Thaniel Monaco with Miller and Associates, the McCook engineering firm which designed the project, said the money spent on the line wasn't wasted. It is being used to move water and can be used in the future to move water to a treatment plant, which may be the only way for the city to meet increasingly strict federal regulations on water quality.

The water project has been going on for six years, and throughout that time plans have changed many times. Mr. Monaco said the long-term idea was to put in a treatment plant, but an alternative was to blend water which is high in nitrates with the flow from other wells. One well, No. 6 south of the football field, has been on standby since 1992 because it is high in nitrate. If the city pumps water out of the well without it being blended, they have to notify all of customers on the system.

Nitrate contamination usually comes from livestock operations and nitrogen fertilizers. In high concentrations, nitrates can be dangerous, especially to young children. Babies are not supposed to drink water with nitrates.

The water project started about 1997 with a search for better-quality water to replace some of the city wells. The existing wells are all in the Sappa Creek stream bed aquifer, which produces highly mineralized, bad-tasting water. The city drilled

City's use dropping

The city has been on watering restrictions for the last week and a half, since July 24. Water use is down, but people still used over 1 million gallons in a 24-hour period five times in the past two weeks.

Those on the municipal water system have used:

- 923,000 gallons on Sunday, July 20.
- 896,000 gallons on Monday, July 21.
- 1,175,000 gallons on Tuesday, July 22.
- 1,168,000 gallons Wednesday, July 23.
- 1,187,000 gallons on Thursday, July 24.
- Water restrictions declared.*
- 933,000 gallons on Friday, July 25.
- 1,217,000 gallons on Saturday, July 26.
- 859,000 gallons on Sunday, July 27.
- 966,000 gallons on Monday, July 28.
- 1,122,000 gallons on Tuesday, July 29.
- 846,000 last Wednesday.
- 901,000 gallons Thursday.
- 1,127,000 gallons Friday.
- 516,000 gallons Saturday.
- 745,000 gallons Sunday.

City Administrator Gary Shike said the reading for Saturday was unusual, but he had no ready explanation for it.

several test wells, searching for water outside of town, spending \$8,112, but that didn't work out.

The next phase was designed to (See WATER on Page 8A)

Service closes Clayton post office

Patrons of the Clayton Post Office received letters last week telling them that services at the office will be suspended effective Friday.

Daniel M. Taylor, manager of post office operations at Salina, who sent the letters, said that the Postal Service had canvassed the immediate area and found no employees available to staff the Clayton office. The office was left without a postmaster following the death of Lea Rae Brooks, 75, on July 18. She had

served as postmaster at Clayton since 1990, following the death of Quentin Hickert. He said this change is tentative.

Alice Barnett of Norcat, who had been serving in the postmaster relief position for 10 years, said she was offered the position of officer-in-charge, but declined.

A Highway Contract Route (HCR), operated by Gary Aumiller of Lenora, already was delivering the mail for Clayton to roadside

mailboxes, and now he can provide retail services also, Mr. Taylor said.

"There will be no change in customers' addresses and the community name and ZIP Code will remain the same," he said.

Retail service is available at the Norcat Post Office, seven miles to the north, with window hours from 7:30 a.m. to noon and 1-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 8-10 a.m. on Saturday; the Lenora Post Office, 7:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. and

1:15-3:50 p.m., weekdays, and 9-10 a.m. on Saturday, and the Jennings Post Office, from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 1-4 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9-10 a.m. on Saturday.

"I realize with change there is always concern," Mr. Taylor said. "We are confident that carrier delivery will provide Clayton customers with effective postal services."

Call Mr. Taylor at (785) 827-6419 or Herb Swan at (402) 644-4106 with questions or comments.

Carnival, events fill fair week

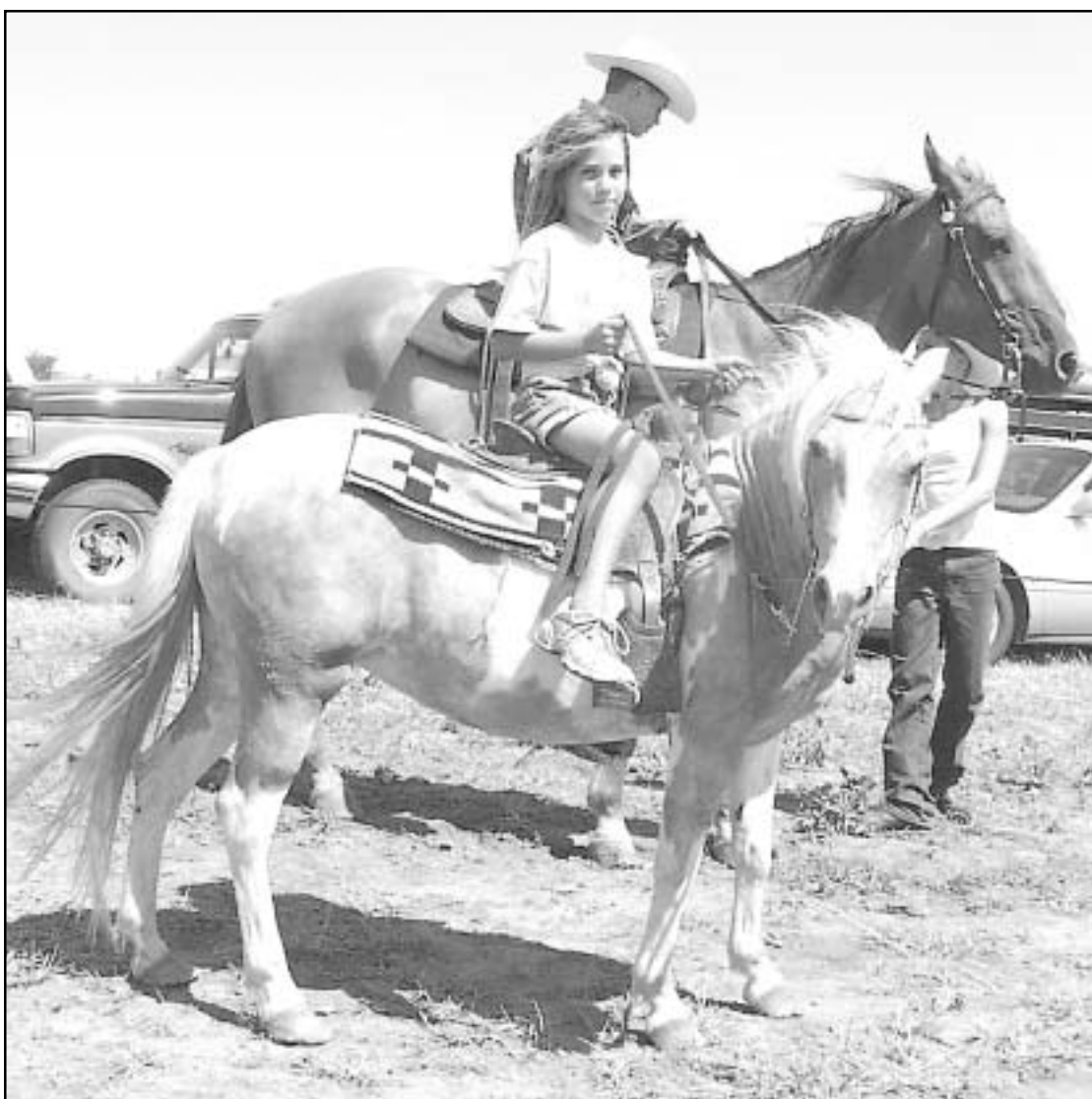
The Decatur County Fair is well underway, with livestock being shown, ribbons given out, plush stuffed animals won and rides whirling at the home-owned carnival, but it isn't over yet.

Tonight at the fairgrounds, there will be the sheep show at 5 p.m., then the exhibits will be open from 6 to 10 p.m. and the carnival from 7 to 11 p.m.

Thursday night, the exhibits will be open from 6 to 10 p.m., the livestock auction will be held at Oberlin Livestock on U.S. 83 at 6:30 p.m. and the carnival will open from 7 to 11 p.m.

At the fairgrounds Friday night, the exhibits will be open from 6 to 10 p.m., the carnival will be open from 7 to 11 p.m. and the Colgate Country Showdown will start at 7 p.m. in front of the grandstands. All exhibits will be released between 9:30 and 10 p.m. and the bale decorating winner will be announced at 10 p.m.

The last night of the fair is Saturday, with the carnival open from 7 to 11 p.m. and the demolition derby in front of the grandstands at 7 p.m. The derby is sponsored by the Oberlin Lions Club.



MOUNTED UP AND READY TO RIDE, Brittany Urban (front) and Logan Fortin took part in the Decatur County Fair horse show on Saturday. See story and another photo on Page 5A

— Herald staff photo by Cynthia Haynes

Leaders say council made best decisions

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

Although Oberlin has spent more than \$1 million on its current water project, council members and the former mayor said it seems like the city will be forced to build a water treatment plant to meet increasingly tighter federal rules.

None of the men blamed the city's engineers, Miller and Associates of McCook, for how the project turned out, nor did they have anything bad to say about the firm.

Mayor Ken Shobe said he thinks

the city is heading in the right direction. Oberlin has a desperate water problem, he said, and this project didn't solve it. He thought the well purchased by the city last September would help, but they were blindsided by uranium contamination found in it.

Uranium came in sky high on the irrigation well, he said, and no one saw that coming.

"This will force us into looking at treatment," he said. "If we want to (See LEADERS on Page 8A)

Water system depends on three working wells

The city of Oberlin has seven wells, three of which are in use, one for which they no longer own a water right, one which was relocated and one which is high in nitrates. The seventh is contaminated by an underground fuel spill.

The wells that are used are No. 9, No. 10 and No. 11. Both No. 9 and No. 10 are just east of the cabinet plants east of town and south of U.S. 36. These wells cannot be pumped together because they are too close.

Well No. 11, the most used well, is south of town north of Family Lumber and east of U.S. 83.

Well No. 8 is in the same area. It is not in service anymore and the water right was taken and used to drill No. 11.

Both wells No. 6 and No. 7 are just east of the high school. The city no longer owns the rights to No. 7. No. 6 is too high in nitrates to be pumped, although the city may be able to blend its water after updating or redrilling the well.

The other well the city owns is No. 5, which is next to the power plant downtown. The well is no longer pumped because of underground fuel contamination.

* Water project focus shifts to other wells

(Continued from Page 1A)
increase capacity from the existing system. Rather than build an expensive treatment plant, the city decided to blend the high-nitrate water with low-nitrate wells, with the idea of having more water available in the system.

Many days in recent hot summers, the city system has had more trouble keeping up with demand for lawn watering and other outside uses. The city has maintained even-odd watering restrictions the last two summers as demand exceeded capacity.

Since the project started nearly five years ago, the plan has changed several times. Originally the idea was to blend water from well No. 6 with two wells east of town. Mr. Monaco said over the years, No. 6 well has deteriorated because it hasn't been used much. When it is on line, the city has to send out warnings to water users about the dangers of nitrate. In order to use the well for blending, it would have to be modified or possibly re-drilled, he said.

That plan changed with the well having lost capacity over the years, said City Administrator Gary Shike. About that time, the city purchased land south of town with a large irrigation well on it. The well had already been tested low in nitrates, which was what the city wanted to blend, said Mr. Monaco. Results came back with the nitrates well below the federal standard.

The city decided that they could blend with that well after re-drilling it and add capacity. All that meant was a little extra pipe, said Mr. Shike. That line was designed but unfortunately has not yet been put in place.

At the same time, the city decided since the project was going right past well No. 7 east of town, between the high school and new practice field, they could work with the state Division of Water Resources to get the water right back and re-drill it.

Mr. Shike said the city had capped that well about five years ago. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment said it was too high in nitrates and needed to be plugged, although some advised them to keep pumping every once in a while it wouldn't lose the water right. The city decided to plug it.

In the last three years, Mr. Shike said, the city found out through conversations with the state Division of Water Resources that they had lost the water right. The state said not to the plan to try to get the right back. Another change in the project was putting large bores under the railroad tracks, said Mr. Monaco, preparing for a treatment plant.

Since competition of the project, the city has received preliminary numbers back from the state on the irrigation well showing that uranium content is almost four times too high to meet new federal standards which went into effect this year. The other city wells are a little high in uranium, Mr. Shike said, but until this year, they hadn't been tested for the element.

The city asked for another test on the irrigation well and sent a sample to a lab in Wyoming. The results came back last week, about the same

as the preliminary numbers. Mr. Shike said the irrigation well is so high in uranium that the water can't be blended. The mixture would still be too high in uranium.

Meanwhile, the city has been forced to go on a water restrictions, ordering residents to water their lawn on an even/odd system which allows each house to water three times a week, because use during the recent hot spell was draining the water tower.

The project may be complete, but the council is still facing decisions on how to get more water, since the blending plan didn't work out. Mr. Shike said the best option, rather than using well No. 6, may be to re-drill No. 9 east of town, moving farther from No. 10 to get more capacity. The council will have to decide what to do, he said.

Did the city throw away \$150,000 on the blending pipe? Mr. Shike said the pipe is being used to move water and will be an integral part to the treatment system some day.

Mr. Monaco said he thinks the city made the right decision to purchase the land and additional water right. It will benefit the city and was done at an extremely good price. One thing to keep in mind, he said, is that the water right doesn't have to be used at the irrigation well site. It can be moved a distance and could be used to re-drill well another well.

Currently, the city is leaning towards re-drilling well No. 9, which has declined in production and has never been able to be pumped at the same time as nearby No. 10. Both are east of town near the cabinet plants. Eventually, Mr. Shike said, he thinks the city will end up building a treatment facility, which could cost a bundle. The other well in use today is No. 11, which is south of town just north of Family Lumber.

Mr. Shike said he still thinks about going outside of town to look for water, but he said he doesn't know what kind of restrictions the state and the federal Environmental Protection Agency will come up with next.

He said he doesn't like the idea of a treatment plant, but if the city can get the well capacity, then a plant could deal with whatever comes out of the wells. With a treatment plant, he said, the city can move the water around and deal with it instead of searching for a "magic solution."

The blending pipe may not be the solution the city envisioned at the beginning of the project, said Mr. Shike, but the water project won't be money wasted regardless of what happens.

It is tough to say how soon the city needs to make a decision for a treatment plant, he added.

Currently, the city is in compliance for arsenic and nitrates on wells No. 9, 10 and 11, which are all in use. If well No. 6 is turned on, nitrates will be exceeded, which is why the city wanted to blend the water to get more capacity.

Mr. Monaco said in order to blend with No. 6, it would need to be updated or a new well would need to be put in. Because of the drop in gallons per minutes it can pump, using it might not be a dramatic benefit to the city.

Colby woman wants light

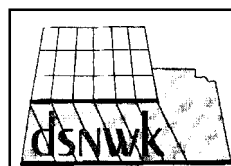
- The numbers tell the story:
- Twenty-six injury and property damage accidents from Jan. 1, 2000, through July 15, 2003.
 - An average of 10 accidents every year, or
 - Nearly one per month.
 - One fatality in 1990

Those numbers apparently aren't serious enough to justify the installation of permanent traffic signals at the intersection that generated these figures, according to one Colby resident who is trying to do something about it.

The location is 4th Street (U.S. 24) and Country Club Drive in east Colby. Currently, that intersection is safer than ever before and provides a smoother flow of traffic, thanks to temporary traffic lights installed while detours are necessary due to road construction, said Bonnie Lewis of Colby, who is spearheading a petition drive to have the state install permanent traffic signals when the construction ends.

The City of Colby, Mrs. Lewis said, has applied again and again for a traffic signal at this location "and they keep getting turned down." She said the state says there are not

enough accidents to warrant a light. "What is it going to take for the Kansas Department of Transportation to wake up and smell the coffee?" she asked. "Do we need to have someone else die?"



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HAPPY WITH HIS PURCHASE: Decatur County Commissioner Doyle Brown spent more than \$200 to buy this football signed by the K-State team at the Decatur County Hospital benefit dinner and auction on Saturday. — Herald staff photo by Cynthia Haynes

* Sewer choices all expensive

(Continued from Page 1A)

In the sequencing batch reactor, everything is done in one tank.

The water goes into a tank, is aerated and then settles, then the liquid is taken out, disinfected and discharged. It is highly mechanical and electrical.

The process in counter-current aeration is just like an oxidation ditch but everything is done in a tank.

Mr. Miller said that the discharg-

ing lagoon is the least expensive, but if the federal standards change, the city might have to change its plant. He said he didn't think it was the best option.

The costs for the plants aren't that much different and it may come down to what the city wants, he said.

Councilman Patrick Pomeroy asked how the city is going to pay for the plant.

City Administrator Gary Shike the city will have to raise sewer rates

and maybe able to get a grant.

After the plan is submitted, said Mr. Reed, there will be time to look into paying for the project. Mayor Ken Shobe said all the money may not have to come from local taxpayers..

Mr. Miller said the engineers will work with Mr. Shike on the money.

The council plans to decide in August what kind of plant the city wants to put in.

City will pick plant type Thursday

The Oberlin City Council will have to decide what kind of waste water treatment plant would be best for the city when it meets at 6:30 p.m. Thursday night at The Gateway.

At the last meeting, Reed Miller, with Miller and Associates engi-

neers of McCook, went over five options for the plant. The city needs to narrow it down to one so planning can start, since the plant has to be completed by the end of 2005.

City Administrator Gary Shike said the council also will have the loan closing on its water project with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Administration.

The council will be approving a resolution for a stage 2 water watch, which the mayor declared after the last meeting. That means the city

will stay with even/odd water restrictions.

There will be a hearing scheduled for a special assessment district to pave the alley behind Farmers Bank and Trust.

Mr. Shike said the council will also look at the standard traffic and uniform public offense code ordinance which must be approved each year.

The meeting, in the upstairs meeting room, is open to the public.

* Leaders say city did OK

(Continued from Page 1A)
keep providing water to our citizens, we have to meet the (federal) requirements."

The project did, he said, help prepare the system for future needs. At some point in time, said Mayor Shobe, the city will probably have to treat its water.

The project included a \$500,000 blending pipe, but there was more. It also included reconstruction of a pipeline down Cass Avenue that will help move water and the new line can still be used for blending. Using water from well No. 6 is still an option for the city, he said.

Former Mayor Gary Walter said he would follow the same procedures they did while planning the project. The council followed the advice of the engineers, he said. It is unfortunate that naturally occurring things popped up in the water.

The council had to go with the best information they had, he said.

Purchasing the land south of town was a smart idea, he added. The way the regulations and standards are going, the city probably is going to have build a treatment plant at some point. When that happens, the extra capacity from the irrigation well will come in handy.

Councilman Stan McEvoy said that while he was hoping the blending system would work, he knew that the city would end up having to treat the water.

The city bought the land south of town at a fair price, he said, and it will come in handy for a lot of things for the city. One of the benefits of the land is the well. The first information the city got about the well said it had good water quality, he said, but that changed with the last report. At that time it was tested for nitrates which the city has been battling in the other wells. The council didn't have an inkling about the uranium problem, he said.

Mr. McEvoy said the land has room for a water treatment plant or a new sewer plant.

The councilman said he is a little disappointed with the way the city wells are going, but he doesn't think it is anything the council could have seen coming. He said he doesn't know if blending right now would help because of the constant stream of new federal standards.

Make sure to attend the



Friday, August 8, at the
Decatur County Fair
7 p.m. at the Grand Stand

