

City puts cash into park wetlands

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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Applause filled the room Thursday night as the Oberlin City Council voted unanimously to pay \$12,025 for an engineer to draw up plans for a wetlands at Sappa Park.

After a presentation by Gary Anderson, co-convenor for the Decatur Tomorrow Steering Committee, Councilwoman Rhonda May made a motion to approve hiring the engineer, with the money coming out of the city's community development fund.

The motion was met with a round of applause from the 20 people in the audience, mostly park supporters.

In 2005, said Mr. Anderson, Decatur Tomorrow was started with the help of Terry Woodbury of Kansas Communities, a Kansas City-based consulting firm. One of the committees under that group covers Sappa Park.

In personal interviews Mr. Woodbury had with people around town and at public meetings that led up to forming the development and planning group, he said, Sappa Park was

the No. 1 priority to a lot of people.

It's tremendous what's been done at the park since 2005, Mr. Anderson said, but it's still an underutilized community asset. Think about what it would cost to replicate the park, he said, probably half a million to a million to build the shelter house, another \$2 million for the dam and more for the roads. It could easily be worth \$5 million, said Mr. Anderson.

At this point, the park needs water to move forward, he said, not only running water, which the council is working on,

but a wetlands.

Water would bring more campers, picnickers and more people in general, he said.

Sappa Park could be a revenue source for the city, said Mr. Anderson. Phillipsburg has a lot where people can pull in and camp. It might have electricity, he said, adding that he didn't know for sure.

People can use the space to camp and leave a donation, said Carolyn Burtis, with the park committee, and Phillipsburg brings in \$3,000 to \$4,000 a summer.

A wetlands or small lake at Sappa Park, said Mr. Anderson, could draw more people, which could mean more money. Someone could maybe sell bait or rent out canoes.

People need to look at the park as not just a liability, he said, but an asset.

The committee, said Mr. Anderson, is at a point where they can't move on without the council members saying they will take the next step.

Rick Pauls, a long-time backer of the park, has put a lot of hours into this project (See WETLAND on Page 5A)

Former owner of bowling alley charged in fire

Arson charges were filed Friday against a co-owner of the Centennial Bowling Alley and the Red Crown Lounge, which burned down three years ago over Memorial Day weekend.

Sheriff Ken Badsky and Deputy Jay Tate arrested Ken Morgan of Oberlin on Friday on a warrant from the attorney general's office. Sheriff Badsky said Mr. Morgan made his first appearance before Judge John Bremer the same day and bond was set at \$100,000.

The defendant requested state-appointed counsel. That afternoon, David O. Baumgartner of Phillipsburg was appointed a Mr. Morgan's attorney.

The charges include two counts of arson, a level 7 nonperson felony.

The fire at the bowling alley and lounge, owned by Mr. Morgan and Maurice Zodrow, started around 3 a.m. on Monday, May 30, 2005.

After the Oberlin Fire Department extinguished the flames, Un-

dersheriff Randy McHugh started an investigation. Later that day, the crime scene was turned over to the state's fire marshal's office. Melvin Dale, an investigator sent out by the office from Garden City, went over the scene.

After nine hours checking out the scene, Mr. Dale declared the fire an arson.

The June 1, 2005, edition of *The Oberlin Herald* reported that, "Mr. Dale said he didn't find a source for an explosion (reported by witnesses), but it could simply have come from the rapid buildup of heat in the fire.

"Flames and smoke were rolling out the west end of the bowling alley roof, over the kitchen, where the fire was most intense. There, the steel roof was warped and buckled. 'At this time, I'm going to call the fire arson,' the investigator said. 'As to how it was set, I'm not going to say at this time. I'll have to wait until

(See ARREST on Page 5A)

Motel operator, city council discuss opportunity for inn

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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The Oberlin City Council talked with a Nebraska man interested in putting a 21-room motel in town at the meeting Thursday, but neither party made an offer.

Dave Winfield of Kearney, Neb., said his chain, Winfield Inn and Suites, focuses on small, rural towns because he likes the people. The motel would have cherry wood furniture and flat screen televisions in the rooms, he said, and the rooms are geared at families and couples in the 45-65 age range. The rates will be affordable, said Mr. Winfield.

The number of rooms can be adjusted, he said, adding that the motel would offer high-speed Internet and a continental breakfast.

The company is based in Kearney, where he owns a strip mall. Mr. Winfield said he is building a 21-room motel in Curtis and a 10-room motel in Arnold. In the motel plans, he said, he tries to leave some land so he can add on later.

Mr. Winfield said he owns his own construction company and will do all of the work. He told the council he always keeps his word,

so as long as the council does the same and is honest and up front with him, they will have a good working relationship.

Have you done a demographic study for the motel? asked Mayor Joe Stanley. Mr. Winfield said he hasn't had a chance. He said he did check out the LandMark Inn here, but hasn't been to the Frontier Motel yet.

Connie Grafel, marketing director of the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., said they have had some communication with the Frontier, who aren't very happy about a new hotel coming in. They said they have some improvements planned for the Frontier, but didn't say when they would happen.

The council asked how many rooms are available in town. Gary Anderson, owner of the LandMark Inn, said he has seven and he thought there were 34 total.

Mr. Winfield said if he does end up building a motel here, it will be a nice, new place but he thought there probably won't be enough business for two motels.

(See MOTEL on Page 5A)

Elevators move corn to make room for wheat

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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With wheat harvest just around the corner, elevators in the county are moving corn around to make room for a lot of grain.

Kurt Anderson, general manager of the Decatur Cooperative Association, said with the large harvest last fall, there's still corn in the elevators. Some has been sold but not yet moved, he said, and some is still owned by farmers waiting for the price to climb.

At the elevator in Oberlin, he added, most of the corn goes to feedlots or ethanol plants and is

shipped by truck. Loading the corn onto a truck, said Mr. Anderson, takes more time than loading into rail cars, which means it costs more because there's more labor involved and higher fuel costs.

Although the amount of corn left, 300,000 bushels, has caused some concern, he said, they have made room for the wheat harvest at the Co-op's seven elevators.

The average amount of wheat brought into the elevators over the last five years has been 2.8 million bushels, he said, and the firm has room to take in that much again.

(See WHEAT on Page 5A)



ON MAIN STREET Sunday, Chris Koerperich and a volunteer cooked pork burgers and bratwurst at the Decatur County Museum for a lunch held for the people riding in Bike Across Kansas. Mary Beth Grisanti, Wichita, got ready to get back on her bicycle to head for Norton after eating at the museum.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis and Cynthia Haynes

Cyclists stop, eat in town

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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Road bikes lined the sidewalks Sunday in front of every restaurant in town and the Last Indian Rain Museum, where board members sold hot bratwurst and pork burgers, fresh chips and cold water.

Around 800 bicyclists came through Oberlin during the day, most stopping to have a bite to eat either at a potato bar at Stellar Sales, Mean Genes, A&W, Pizza Hut, the Re-Load, the LandMark Inn or at the county museum.

The riders which started in St. Francis on Friday, were headed east to the Missouri River at Atchison, riding border to border in the annual Bike Across Kansas.

They stayed the night in Atwood on Saturday and planned to camp out Sunday in Norton.

People in Oberlin planned meals for the riders, including a breakfast buffet at the LandMark, a pancake feed and then lunch at the museum, and lunch at the (See BICYCLISTS on Page 5A)



Hail darkens downtown as globes get whacked

Hail destroyed many of the globes on the lights on Oberlin's downtown canopies Thursday, forcing the city to replace all the globes.

The county has been under severe thunderstorm or tornado watches and warnings for much of the last

three weeks, and a severe thunderstorm watch had been issued for the afternoon and evening on Thursday.

About 4 p.m. that afternoon, Oberlin and the county were hit by a hail storm which knocked down

tomato plants in backyards and broke the globes that cover the lights on Main Street.

More than 30 of the 53 globes over the lights downtown are broken, said City Administrator Gary Shike.

"The older, more discolored globes tended to be the ones that survived," he said.

The city will order replacements for all of the globes so all will be the same color, he said.

(See STORM on Page 5A)

High school track gets face lift



MEN WITH THE FIRM, Track Restoration out of Wichita, worked resurfacing the track at Decatur Community High School last week. Superintendent Pat Cullen said he thought the project would be done today. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

*Motel operator looks at Oberlin

(Continued from Page 1A)
The Frontier, the last of three motels in town still operating, stays pretty full with construction workers, said Mr. Anderson. Two closed in the last decade, though a couple of older ones had closed years before.
Mr. Winfield asked if the city has someone to bring events into the civic center. Currently there is no manager for The Gateway, although Ms. Grafel does schedule events.
“What are you asking for?” asked Councilwoman Rhonda May.
In Nebraska, said Ms. Grafel, the communities do a tax increment financing program, but Kansas doesn’t have that, so the development group had suggested a property tax abatement and a sales tax exemption to get the new motel built.
The community provides the

Council Roundup

At a meeting Thursday night, the Oberlin City Council:
• Gave the city foreman a hand and a raise for finishing the last phase of lineman’s training and running the power plant during a recent storm. Story to come.
• Accepted donation of land south

land, \$16,000 in paving, does the dirt work, brings in the water, sewer and electrical lines and then issues bonds, said Mr. Winfield, which would be sold on the open market.
He said he was also asking for the property tax abatement and a sales tax exemption for 10 years. The property tax abatement can’t be longer than 10 years, said Mr. Shike, the sales tax exemption is just for

of the ball fields for a parking lot. Story on Page 3A.
• Agreed to pay \$12,025 for an engineer to draw up plans for a wetlands at Sappa Park, followed by a round of applause supporters. Story on Page 1A.
construction materials.
Has there been any commitment to build yet? asked Ms. May. Mr. Winfield said he is still looking things over.
He said he needs two to three acres for the motel, which leaves space to add rooms.
How many employees would there be? asked Mayor Stanley. If the motel is full all the time, four to

five, the developer replied.
He said he likes the area at the corner of the airport to build on. Ms. Grafel said they talked with the consultant working on the airport project, who said with the new runway that wouldn’t be a good place because the rooms would be at the end of the new runway.
Mr. Winfield said he would like to be on the highway, on the “main drag,” within walking distance to The Gateway.
The next step, he said, is for the council to talk the proposal over. Mr. Winfield said he has some things to still look at.
“If there is a decision one way or another, call me,” he said.
At the end of the presentation Mr. Winfield received a round of applause from the almost 20 people in the audience.

*Wetlands project gets boost from city

(Continued from Page 1A)
trying to keep the costs down.
It will cost \$12,025 at a minimum to get the engineers contract signed so the work will start, Mr. Anderson said, and the firm wants half up front to start.
There’s a possibility, said Mr. Pauls, if the wetlands meets requirements of the federal Natural

Resources Conservation Service that the agency might pay \$3,000 of that price.
A 15-acre lake, said Ms. May, means the water can only be one foot deep. She said she would rather have a five acre lake with water three feet deep.
Water out of the last lagoon at the new sewage treatment plant is be-

ing discharged into the creek, said Mr. Pauls. Mayor Joe Stanley said there’s been water in the creek all the way to the golf course all year.
There’s another idea of putting in a community orchard or garden at the park too, said Mr. Anderson.
Does the council want to take action on this? asked Mayor Stanley. The council needs to go on this,

said Councilman Ray Ward. It’s a wonderful idea and the majority of council wants it.
This is a quality-of-life issue, said Ms. May. The people in Oberlin are willing to support it. The project probably won’t be as expensive as some think, she said, and finally there’s one unified plan.

*Storm destroys downtown lights

(Continued from Page 1A)
The older globes have a vertical seam, Mr. Shike said, and the newer ones a horizontal seam which doesn’t seem as flexible and resistant to hail.
The city shut off power to the lights, said Mr. Shike, so the water won’t get inside and ruin the bulbs.
Mr. Shike said he has called Kansas Electric out of Hays to order the globes, but the company hasn’t gotten back to him about the price. He doesn’t know when the city will have the new globes or when the lights will be back on.
Some of the globes on the cast iron lights in town were broken during the storm, too, he said.
Although a tornado warning was issued for Oberlin and Decatur County by the National Weather

Service in Goodland, the sirens never did go off.
Scott Mentzer, a meteorologist with the weather service, said the warning was issued because of rotation in the clouds detected by radar.
Basically, he said, the storms across the area were caused by a warm front that moved across the area from the south, bringing moist and unstable air to the High Plains. Storms developed over southwest Sherman County and moved northeast, right over Oberlin.
People reported lots of hail in Oberlin and Decatur County, said Mr. Mentzer. Sizes ranged from golf ball to tennis ball all the way from southwest of Goodland up to Oberlin, he said.
There weren’t any tornados spotted in the county, he added.

*Bicyclists travel through town

(Continued from Page 1A)
Re-Load, normally closed on Sunday.
Nancy McKee of Lawrence, who was eating lunch at the museum’s Old Bohemian Hall, said it’s great to take part in this kind of ride because it gives her the chance to see towns like Oberlin, which are just beautiful.
Mrs. McKee said she’d taken part in this ride before, back in the early 1980s, then took several years off to raise kids, and started back up in 2005.
Besides the Bike Across Kansas, she said, she’s also done Border Raiders, which starts in Lawrence, then goes into Ne-

braska, Iowa and Missouri and back to Lawrence.
She said she doesn’t ride her road bike a lot to train. She actually has a bike that she rides on gravel roads and a stationary one in the house for the winter.
Outside the museum, Russ Bass, of Wisconsin was getting ready to get back on his bike before riding around town.
Mr. Bass, 65, said he was doing the ride with his wife and her sister, although they were still on the road behind him. He said his sister-in-law is from Arkansas, and she doesn’t get the chance to train as much since she lives close to the Ozarks.

*Wheat time draws near for elevators

(Continued from Page 1A)
Mr. Anderson said he’s driven around the county a little to take a look at this year’s crop, which he thought would most likely start being cut around the end of June. When depends on how wet the weather is, he said.
The manager said he hasn’t driven everywhere in the county, but he’s seen some areas where the crop is going to be above average and others where it’s below. There is some patchy wheat, he said.
At Norcat Grain, Manager Todd Johnson said he hasn’t had the chance to get out and look at the wheat, but he’s heard it is good.
The elevator, he said, doesn’t have a lot of corn left from last year’s crop, adding that they aren’t putting out any information on how much room the elevator has for wheat.

room for about 350,000 bushels of new crop.
The wheat in the Traer area looks pretty good, he said. Some continuous-crop wheat people thought was done for, he said, but that last rain really greened it up. The Traer area, said Mr. Grafel, has received around five to seven inches of rain since just before Memorial Day. He said they haven’t received a lot of hail.
The recent moisture, said Brian Olson, area agronomist with Kansas State University Extension Service, has definitely helped the crop. At the beginning of May, he said, the wheat was looking pretty rough, with a lot of fields heading for depressed yields.
Now, he said, there’s some yield potential out there.
There has been some hail damage, said Mr. Olson, and some people lost their entire crop. It just seems it’s typical of what happens in this area when there is a big rain, he said; sometimes there’s hail, too.
For the most part, though, he said, things are looking good.
Mr. Olson said he doesn’t know when harvest will begin, since that depends on the weather, but it will probably be later than last year.

At the elevator, said Mr. Johnson, they are doing the normal tasks to get ready for harvest, including lots of cleaning and things like that.
D&S Grain in Traer has 5,000 bushels of corn left from last year which will be shipped out before harvest. There’s a little wheat left, said co-owner Dan Grafel, leaving

*Arrest made in three-year old business blaze

(Continued from Page 1A)
tests are back from the lab.”
At the beginning of 2006, Mr. Morgan and Mr. Zodrow filed a lawsuit against underwriters with Lloyd’s of London who insured the building. The men were seeking \$300,000, the amount the building was insured for.
Later that year, court records showed statements from the insurance carrier that its defense would be that the owners set or had someone set the fire. In April 2007, the lawsuit was dismissed after an out-of-court settlement.
At the time, Mr. Zodrow said the settlement wasn’t enough to rebuild.

Original reports showed the damage near \$750,000. Mr. Zodrow said he wasn’t allowed to say how much the co-owners received.
The suit was filed against Heritage Managing Agency Ltd., underwriters with Lloyd’s of London, which is known for working with movie stars and the like to insure things like an actress’s legs.
Mr. Morgan was still in the Decatur County Jail on Monday. Sheriff Badsky said he doesn’t know of any other charges coming in the case.
A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 10 a.m. on Monday, June 16.
Ashley Anstaett, spokesperson for Attorney General Robert Six, said the office is handling the case is because Decatur County Attorney Steve Hirsch referred it to them. The reason it took three years to file charges, she said, is because the lawyer who was handling the case ended up leaving the office and it was transferred to another attorney, who had to get caught up.
Mrs. Anstaett said she couldn’t comment on the evidence behind the arson charge. The attorney who filed the charges, Barry Disney, was in conference for two days and did not return a call.

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