

City budget shows \$600,000 deficit

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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The Oberlin City Council looked at the 2010 budget again last Thursday, trying to figure out how to make a \$600,000 deficit go away, but didn't make any decisions.

The council plans to meet again at 7 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway to discuss the budget, which has to be sent to the county clerk by Tuesday, Aug. 25. Alternatives include cutting services and payroll, council members said, or raising taxes, neither all that appealing.

With new accounting software in use this year, the budget looks different than it has in the past. Accounts are listed differently for departments, and as City Adminis-

Council Roundup

At a meeting last Thursday, the Oberlin City Council:

- Looked at the 2010 budget, but didn't make any decisions. Story at left.
- Gave the OK to sign a contract for a grant agreement to revamp the existing runway and do an aeronautical survey of the city airport. Story below left.
- Asked the city administrator to find out how much the monthly bills need to be for city water users before the city will be able to receive grant money to help pay for a water

treatment plant and possible water distribution system improvements. Story below.

- Hired Miller and Associates, a McCook engineering firm, to help with a loan and grant for solar mixers for the sewage lagoons, which the firm designed. Story to come.
- Spent almost the first hour of the meeting in closed sessions to discuss nonelected personnel with no action taken. Story on Page 3A.

trator Austin Gilley pointed out at one meeting, some of the items were being paid for out of the general fund instead of out of the department they are used for.

With the new budget, he said,

that's been remedied, but on some items, there is no history on those items and he wasn't sure how much to put in each line. Some items only have a history in the new software since the beginning of June, he

said. Since the last meeting, he said he added \$20 per call for the firefighters. They were getting \$10 a call. That will cost around \$400 to \$500 a year, but it is what the county has

been paying for some time.

At this time, he said the proposed budget has a \$604,530 deficit, which isn't a good situation to be in. The options are to increase taxes, make cuts or use reserves.

The property tax levy in this budget is the same as last year, said Mr. Gilley, 85.29 mills. It was 85.46 for 2009.

This budget is a projection, with estimates, he said, and nothing is set, but it does show the city operating with a deficit.

Some council members had questions about the budget, and Mr. Gilley tried to answer or explain the reasoning for the numbers.

One of those was about the \$302,000 in the special highway

fund. The street department personnel is paid out of that, said Mr. Gilley. Primarily, that is money from the state to be spent on roads. The city has been carrying forward a balance in the account, but doesn't have a street plan at this time.

Councilman Bill Riedel said he can't support a budget that takes half a million out of the reserves. He said cuts need to be made and now.

There are some fixed costs, he said, but he proposed going line item by line item and whacking 10 percent. He added that the council should look at the equipment it plans to buy and see how badly it's needed.

With the proposed cost-of-living (See BUDGET on Page 10A)

Council OKs signing contract for airport grant

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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After a somewhat heated discussion on the airport expansion project Thursday, the Oberlin City Council again gave approval to have someone sign a contract for a grant agreement to revamp the existing runway and do an aeronautical survey for the municipal airport.

At its meeting on Thursday, July 2, the council approved sending in the grant application. City Administrator Austin Gilley said last week, however, that under city ordinances, he doesn't have the authority to sign a contract unless the council has approved it.

The total for the project is \$200,000, said Mr. Gilley, with 90 percent of it to be reimbursed by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Two and a half years ago, said Gaylord Shields, a member of the airport committee, the city gave the agency its word, so to speak, that if the city applied for grants to a 5,500-foot runway that could be extended to 7,000 feet, it would work toward completing the project. Both the city and the county made a commitment,

said Mr. Shields.

There was a vote two weeks ago, said Mr. Shields, and if that would have failed, it would have junked the last 2 1/2 years of work. Since the city and county have committed to the project before, he asked, why is it necessary to vote on the project all the time?

"If we turn this down," he said, "then the Federal Aviation Administration will never do a project like this with us again."

If he had the legal authority to sign the contract, said Mr. Gilley, he would have done it and this wouldn't have come up.

Councilman Bill Riedel, who voted against sending in the grant application, said people shouldn't think for a minute that he's against the project or making Oberlin a better place. Two and a half years ago, he said, there were more people in the city and the economy was better.

Mr. Riedel said he didn't think the citizens of Oberlin should have to foot the bills for the project and not the county.

(See AIRPORT on Page 10A)

County questions airport progress

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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The Decatur County commissioners talked with the marketing director for the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. about the proposed airport runway project and what happens next.

Director Connie Grafel said a grant application for the existing runway and an aeronautical survey of airport needs was approved at an Oberlin City Council meeting on Thursday, July 2, and mailed in the next day. She said she's already received word that it was approved.

She said she's checking into how much land the city really needs for a longer runway. It was originally thought over 300 acres would be needed, but with a 5,500 foot run-

way, said Ms. Grafel, she's going to ask the engineers to look at it again.

Ms. Grafel said she's not sure why people are getting so excited about a 7,000 foot runway.

The community first has to get a 5,500 foot runway, she said, and the only way to get a 7,000 foot runway then would be to prove that we need it.

The group, she said, needs a letter from the county about the road north of the runway that would need to be closed.

This has to be done before anything can be done with the environmental assessment, she said.

Commissioner Stan McEvoy said the commissioners gave a letter to Jim Wesch, a board member of (See LETTER on Page 10A)

Bridges restricted for heavy trucks

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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Two bridges on U.S. 36 east of Oberlin have been posted with restricted weight limits, meaning trucks that weigh too much will have to go around the area, taking a route through Jennings and Selden, adding 28 miles to a 35-mile trip.

Al Plante, district office coordinator for Kansas Department of Transportation in Norton, said the bridges have restrictions of 25 tons for a two-axle truck and 40 tons for a truck-and-trailer tandem or a semi trailer rig. Those are the normal maximum loads for trucks in Kansas.

The restrictions basically mean that heavier loads, known as superloads, will have to be rerouted, said Mr. Plante, nearly doubling their time. The weight restrictions could effect farmers, if they are loaded.

The restrictions, he said, were put in place because of deterioration and age of the bridges. All of the state's bridges are inspected once a year, he said.

The two east of Oberlin were inspected this year, after which signs went up in Oberlin and between Norton and Oberlin notifying truckers with heavy loads that the bridges can't be used.

(See RESTRICTED on Page 10A)



Frog campers paint

IN CITY PARK, grade-school-aged kids meet three days a week for FROGS camp. Cerys Davies (above left) and TyLynn Peterson worked on birdhouses, as did Faith Meitl (right). The kids play games, do activities and have snacks in the morning on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The camp is offered, free of charge, until the end of the month by the Oberlin Covenant Church.

— Herald staff photos by Cynthia Haynes



Administrator looking at water prices for users

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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The Oberlin City Council asked the city administrator to find out what monthly bills need to be for city water users so the city can get grants to help pay for a water treatment plant and proposed water distribution improvements.

At the meeting last Thursday, the council discussed options for a water treatment plant. The city has already applied for a \$4.4 million from the United States Department of Agriculture to build a plant and do some water system improve-

ments. Administrator Austin Gilley said he's been asked if the council wants to move ahead with part two of the project, replacing parts of the distribution system.

Applications for a state Community Development Block Grant are due in October, he said. Before applying, the council needs to decide where they are going with the project, the administrator said.

The principle and interest payment, said Mr. Gilley, is in the budget for the loan already on the table. The budget doesn't include a payment

for any additional money.

The council has discussed options with the treatment plant, including a reverse osmosis system and drilling into the Dakota Aquifer to tap a large reservoir of salt water. Some of the money to drill into the Dakota could possibly be reimbursed from water payments owed by Nebraska and Colorado, he said.

Mayor Joe Stanley said he'd heard that settlement money from water lawsuits had been cut. Cases against Nebraska and Colorado are not (See WATER on Page 10A)

*Water project could expand to distribution

(Continued from Page 1A)
final, in any event.

Mr. Gilley said Dave Barber, with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development office, has suggested the city apply for part two of the project because the city may be able to get grant money which would not have to be repaid.

The group talked about the water rates needed to help repay the loan and interest on the project.

The state Department of Agriculture, said David Blau, with Miller and Associates, the engineers designing the project, wants cities that apply for loans to have affordable user rates. The city can do a \$4.4 million loan and have an affordable rate, but the question is, if they go above that, if the rate would still be affordable. If the user rate gets higher, he said, then there might be some grant money to help pay for additional parts of the project.

Part of the letter of condition for the loan from the Department of Agriculture requires a rate increase, Mr. Blau said. He said he thinks the cap on the rate is between \$26 to \$38 for the average user.

There was some question about whether people can afford anything higher, even about how much will be needed to build a water treatment plant.

If the council wants to add to or change the project, said Mr. Blau, he thinks the state Department of Agriculture would want the first loan to be cancelled, then have the city change or add to the project and re-apply.

Councilwoman Rhonda May said although it's clear to her the distribution upgrades are needed, it isn't clear to her which water treatment plant the city should build.

The city choose a coagulation process a couple of years ago, said Mayor Stanley. At that time, the council looked at options and decided on this because it was the least expensive to maintain.

The best system is probably the reverse osmosis, said Mr. Blau, but it's more expensive to run. It also wastes 15 to 20 percent of the water, noted Mayor Stanley.

While Mayor Stanley said he didn't see a reason not to apply for the Community Development Block Grant, Mr. Blau said doing that would create a deadline to complete the project.

If the city would be borrowing the maximum that would keep the user rate in the limits of what is acceptable, said Councilman Bill Riedel, and the rest would have to come from grant money, why not do the system the right way? That would include doing part two of the project, including the distribution system.

Mrs. May agreed, saying if the city can get grant money to do the upgrades and have a better water system without a cost to the taxpayers, they should go for it.

The council talked some more about the reverse osmosis system, but heard that the city would need a lagoon system to hold the waste and more money to operate it.

It might be a good idea for the council to get information on all of the water treatment options, said Mayor Stanley.

Mr. Riedel said he wants to know how much the city has to borrow before grant money that doesn't have to be repaid would be available. If it's \$8 million, he said, then probably not, but if it's \$4 million, then it would be worth going for it.

It may take too long to get the answers from the government, said Councilman Ray Ward. The city has dilly dallied too long with this project, he said.

The council asked Mr. Gilley to get some information about the threshold for user payments before the city can get grant money and look at the distribution system and what needs to be done.

Making a donation



AT THE GATEWAY last Thursday, Dave Olson, chatted with a technician, who kept watch over him as he donated a pint of blood to the American Red Cross. Several stations

allowed for more than one person to donate at a time during the all day event in the arena.

— Herald staff photo by Carolyn Plotts

*Airport grant contract to be signed

(Continued from Page 1A)

He noted that the hospital has gone to using medical helicopters, not airplanes. There's a deficit in the budget this year and one in the budget for 2010.

It's going to cost \$200,000 to \$250,000 for the local share of the runway project, he said Mr. Reidel. The people in Oberlin, said Mr. Riedel, shouldn't have to pay for all of it.

The county has made a commitment for money for the project, said Mr. Shields. For 50 years, he said,

he's been involved in economic development. This has been the city's biggest opportunity. If the city backs out this time, he said, there's no coming back even for a 4,000 foot runway.

This community has missed out on the railroad and interstate, he said. The runway connects Oberlin to the rest of the world, said Mr. Shields.

People he's talked to, said Mr. Riedel, say if the economy was better, they would be all for it.

"How many people?" asked Mr.

Shields.

Around seven or eight that come to mind right now, said Mr. Riedel. Over 30 people have come to meetings about the airport and supported the project, said Mr. Shields.

Mayor Joe Stanley suggested they get back on topic. This is the same thing the council approved at the last meeting, said Connie Grafel, marketing director for the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. It's just the contract that needs to be signed.

Mayor Stanley said he wanted to

know if he could have signed the contract so this wouldn't have had to come up.

The ordinances say, said Mr. Gilley, that contracts have to be approved before they are signed. This is a question for City Attorney Steve Hirsch, who was on vacation and wasn't at the meeting, he said.

Mayor Stanley said he would check with the lawyer, and the council agreed to have whoever can sign the contract do it as soon as they get an answer.

*Budget talks continue

(Continued from Page 1A)
raises for employees, said Mr. Riedel, he compared city wages here to those in other towns of comparable size. Oberlin's wages are actually above the median, he said, and the benefits the city provides are competitive.

Overtime is budgeted in, said Mr. Riedel. Although overtime happens, he said, he's never seen it built into the budget. Maybe the city should hire some part-time people to help keep overtime down or maybe the employees need to adjust their hours.

Overtime numbers, said Mr. Gilley, are based on what was done in 2008. Mr. Riedel said he's not saying that the city isn't going to pay overtime, but he doesn't think they should start with a number built in.

The county just had the best wheat harvest ever, said Lee Franklin, who was in the audience, and it's set up for the best corn harvest. He asked if the council thought that would have any impact on the city.

There could possibly be a small increase in sales taxes, said Mayor Joe Stanley. Mr. Gilley said he actu-

ally had decreased the sales tax estimate because the Kansas League of Municipalities projected revenue would be down across the state. That number was moved back up to where it was in 2009.

Mayor Stanley said he kind of agreed with Mr. Reidel that paying a 10-to-15 percent increase in wages is pretty generous. That compensation is based on the position, not on the person doing the job, said Mr. Gilley. This includes a handful of people, but doesn't include the cost of living raises.

Mr. Gilley said he's scared to propose a balanced budget. He added that he didn't think this was the year to do that, especially with a new accounting system. If the city really wants to cut back, he said, that will mean getting rid of employees and services.

The property tax levy will bring in about the same as last year, he said, so the alternative is raising taxes.

It would probably not be good to make a decision tonight, said Mayor Stanley. Everyone is probably too tired. The meeting adjourned at 11:13 p.m.

*Restricted bridges detour heavy trucks

(Continued from Page 1A)

In this district, which covers northwest Kansas, said Mr. Plante, two bridges on U.S. 24 between Hoxie and Studley got restrictions at the same time, one east of Stockton on the same road, one north of Athol on K-8 and one north of Lebanon on U.S. 281.

This is the first year for restrictions on all of those bridges, he said. In a year, they will be inspected again, he said, and the weight limit could be lowered.

Bridges are expensive, said Mr.

Plante, and there is no telling when the state might be able to replace them. The two east of Oberlin were probably built when U.S. 36 was put in, he said, possibly back in the 1930s.

Bridges between Oberlin and Norcatu were widened in the 1970s when the road got wider shoulders.

Most bridges back then, he said, were designed to have a 50-year life span. Until the state gets a little more money coming in, he said he doesn't see the bridges getting replaced.

The cost depends on the size of the bridge, he said, but it isn't a cheap job. For now the restrictions will stay in place. Drivers who break the rules and get caught will pay fines.

Fines, said Mr. Plante, are based on how much over the weight a truck is.

That's regulated by the motor carrier inspectors. They can pretty much tell by looking at a truck if it's overweight, he said, but they do travel with scales.

Mr. Plante said anyone can go on the Kansas Department of Trans-

portation website and find the numbers.

A couple years ago, he said, a bridge in Minnesota collapsed. Mr. Planate said he thought that has helped spur Kansas to look at its bridges more rigorously.

The bridges are getting older and loads are getting bigger, he said. The bridges need to be restricted and big trucks need to go around them.

This is about public safety, he said, because the state doesn't have the money to replace the bridges now.

*Letter from county to close road given to director

(Continued from Page 1A)

the development group. They also called to talk with Brad Weisenberger, with BWR, the engineers on the project, about the road.

The letter addressed to Mayor Joe Stanley explains the procedure the county has to follow to close a road, starting with a legal request for it to be closed.

Then the county clerk will send out a notice, a hearing is held and a decision is made.

At the council meeting on Thursday, July 2, said Ms. Grafel, a question came up about why the county

isn't helping pay for the runway. She said she explained that the county has been asked to put money aside for the project, adding that she thinks the county is participating.


"We are doing all we can without

an election," said Mr. McEvoy.

Decatur County and Oberlin have the shortest runway in an 18-county region, other than St. Francis, said Ms. Grafel.

If there was an emergency and

they needed to call in the National Guard, said Ms. Grafel, she isn't sure whether they would be able to land here.



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19	20 Bone Density Cardiac Rehab	21	22 Mammograms Diabetic Clinic Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab	23 Dr. Curtis Cardiology	24 MRI's Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab	25
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