

Airport numbers really do add up

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
k.davis@nwkansas.com

While the numbers presented at an informational meeting about the airport Thursday didn't seem to add up, a few questions to the officials involved produced a better picture of the project's costs.

Numbers for local support and money from the Federal Aviation Administration presented in City Council meetings and by City Administrator Austin Gilley at the meeting Thursday are for a 7,000-foot runway, the project the city started with. Those from the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. and the airport advisory committee are for a 5,500-foot runway.

Mr. Lohofener, who got up at the end of the meeting, after Mr. Gilley was done, said only 2 1/2 percent of

the \$12.5 million project will come out of city coffers for a 5,500 foot runway.

Mr. Lohofener showed a \$745,000 local share broken down into \$45,000 from the city, \$400,000 in revenue bonds, \$100,000 in stimulus money for an automated fueling station, \$150,000 from a U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development loan and \$50,000 from Decatur County. That totals \$195,000 to be paid by the city, including the loan, and \$50,000 from the county.

The revenue bonds would be paid back first with profits from fuel sales, said Mr. Lohofener, while the loan would be paid back by the city.

For a 7,000-foot runway, said Mr. Gilley, the information from the engineer shows local support

Petition would stop spending

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
k.davis@nwkansas.com

A petition to prohibit spending any federal, state, city or private money for a new runway at the Oberlin airport was certified by the Decatur County clerk on Friday, meaning that the council will either have to accept the dictate or put the issue up for a vote.

With the confirmed signatures of 189 registered city voters, the next step is for the petition is to be presented to the City Council. That should happen when the council meets at 7 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway.

Clerk Colleen Geihlsler said she received the

petition Friday morning. Steve and Marilyn Horn and Joanne Lahman carried the petition, asking for signatures from those who don't want to see further work done to build a new runway. The project would cost an estimated \$10,915,680 from the Federal Aviation Administration, with local sources paying up to \$545,784 for the 5,500 foot runway. For a proposed 7,000-foot runway, it would cost the government \$11,381,930 and local sources \$831,530, according to numbers from the engineers.

The petition says, "The City of Oberlin is hereby prohibited from spending any federal, state, city

(See AIRPORT on Page 12A)

at \$831,530 with federal money at \$11,381,930.

The city could sell revenue bonds,

said Mr. Gilley, to pay for the project.

The current airport, he said, costs

around \$10,000 to run for a year, adding that he isn't sure how accurate that number is.

The future operation is projected at \$31,500 a year, said Mr. Gilley, although the engineers have estimated it at \$50,000. An unknown number in that is the cost for administration and marketing, because the city doesn't have anyone working fulltime at the airport.

Mr. Lohofener said he also had an estimated budget for the airport at \$50,000 a year, with \$10,000 for repairs and maintenance, \$25,000 for a manager and office supplies, \$6,000 for utilities and \$9,000 for marketing.

There's one rented city hangar, said Mr. Gilley, but no one knows what that number will be in the future. Five planes are based here, with the potential of nine total.

People pay the city to lease ground for nine private hangars at (See NUMBERS on Page 12A)



Students learn to play

IN BAND CLASS at the grade school on Monday, Andrew Wade (above) worked on a piece on his trumpet. After the students tried the piece once, Teacher Sarah Bricker worked with them to clap out the beat, which Keagen Blau (left) did. After the students clapped a beat a few times, they tried it again on their instruments.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

Thresher show this weekend at fairground

The Decatur County Fairground will open up Saturday and Sunday for the 29th annual Mini Sappa Antique Thresher and Engine Show.

Traditionally, the show has been held the first weekend in October, but so many people are involved in corn harvest, said Reva Marshall, one of the organizers, that the club decided to move the show up.

The group started the show 29 years ago, she said, because they wanted to teach the younger generations — their grandkids and great-grandkids — about how their ancestors used to thresh wheat and shuck corn and how farm machinery used to work.

The group is a nonprofit organization, trying to keep history alive, she said. There's no charge to get into the show.

The show kicks off each day with a 7 a.m. breakfast cooked and served out of the 4-H Building at the fairground. After that, free registration starts at 7:30 a.m., with events starting up at 9 a.m.

Throughout the day, a craft market, demonstrations of antique farm

machinery, kids games and food will be available. There will also be a quilt show both days in the Open Class building.

Other activities will include:

- A kids' pedal tractor pull at 11 a.m. Saturday.

- Free train rides from 1 to 3 p.m. both days.

- A "stock" garden-tractor pull at 1 p.m. Saturday.

- A parade at 4 p.m. Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday.

- A nondenominational church service at 8 a.m. Sunday led by Jim Plotts Jr. from Norcatour.

Starting at 6 p.m. Saturday, the group will serve a barbecue supper at the fairgrounds for \$6 a person. The meal is free to exhibitors and vendors. The menu includes a barbecue pork sandwich, baked potato and green beans.

The group is raffling off a Case-International pedal tractor with trailer and a Traeger Junior Grill. Tickets are \$1 each or \$5 for six.

The items will be given away after the parade on Sunday. Ticket holders don't have to be present to win.

Homecoming game set for Friday night

Decatur Community High School graduates will return home Friday for the first home Red Devils football game, which also happens to be the school's Homecoming.

Students started working on their window decorating competition and floats earlier in the week, although the bonfire and pep rally, parade, assembly, game and dance aren't until the end of the week.

Counselor Brenda Breth said the theme for the window decorating competition is commercials, but no theme has been selected yet for the floats.

The pep rally and bonfire will start at 8 p.m. Thursday starting at the high school. At 1:15 p.m. Friday in the auditorium will be the assembly, followed by the Homecoming parade on Main Street.

This year, said Mrs. Breth, the

10-year queen is Erica Martin, who is out of the country and cannot attend. Danielle Bailey, a candidate for queen that year, will fill in for Ms. Martin. C.J. Peters will be the athlete from the past.

Candidates for this year's queen include Brandi Diederich, Jessica Fredrickson, Kira Meitl, Adrienne Pauls and Ashley Samson. King candidates are Wiley Farr, Cody Kane, Kaden Macfee, Toby Peters and Justin Williams.

The flower girl will be Skylar Brown, daughter of Doug and Pat Brown, and the crown bearer is Landon Macfee, son of Dennis and Shelly Macfee.

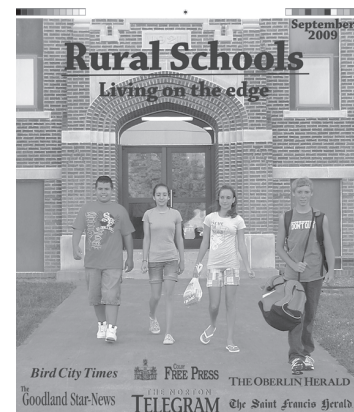
The Red Devils football game with Plainville will start at 7 p.m. Friday at Smick Field, with the Homecoming dance scheduled for 7 to 11 p.m. Saturday at the school.

School section inside

Inside this week's edition of *The Oberlin Herald*, readers will find a special section on the state of schools in northwest Kansas.

The edition, produced by all the papers in the Northwest Newspaper group, covers the history of the districts, current enrollment in this part of the state, consolidation, cooperative agreements and what's happening at the state level.

Schools and former districts included in the issue include Brewster, Cheylin, Colby, Edmond, Densmore, Gem, Golden Plains, Goodland, Atwood and Herndon, Jennings, Lenora, Logan, Norcatour, Northern Valley, Norton, Menlo, Oberlin and St. Francis.



* Numbers are important in airport talks

(Continued from Page 1A)
the airport now, but they own the building.

Numbers from 2007 show 1,800 take-off and landings, the administrator said.

Numbers from the engineering report, from June, show for a 5,500-foot runway with a local cost of \$545,784, while the cost to the government would be \$10,915,680.

This number doesn't include the \$100,000 fueling station, he said.

From day one, over three years ago, said Project Manager Connie Grafel, the economic development marketing director, the government agency has made it clear that if and when the city gets a 5,500-foot runway, it would have to have positive projections for increased traffic or heavier loads before getting approval to expand the runway to 7,000 feet. This is why the current focus is on the 5,500-foot runway, she said.

There are no design plans at this time, said Ms. Grafel, so there is no reason to remain focused on a 7,000-

foot runway when the project is still in the first phase. In that phase, over the next five years, the environmental assessment draft calls for new primary construction of 4,800 feet by 100 feet. The second phase, which will last from six to 10 years, is for design, grade and construction of a 700-foot extension to that runway, to a full 5,500 feet.

The third phase, 11 to 20 years away, would be for a 1,500-foot extension to 7,000 feet, but there's just no guarantee that will ever happen.

While there is talk about the 5,500-foot runway, Mr. Gilley said, the government has agreed only to pay for 4,800 feet.

The agency, said Mr. Gilley, hasn't agreed to pay for anything beyond that so far, but paying for and planning are two different issues.

The city is currently paying for a survey and environmental assessment for a 7,000-foot runway, he added, but that will cover the shorter phases as well.

'Look, we got books!'



ON MONDAY, Malia Bishop (left) and Madison Fick walked back to the kindergarten building after checking books out from the Oberlin Elementary School library.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

* Airport petition filed

(Continued from Page 1A)
or private funds for the purpose of studying, planning or building a new runway or acquiring additional land at the Oberlin Airport. Nothing herein shall prohibit the maintenance and improvement required by the FAA to maintain the existing runway."

When a petition comes in, said City Attorney Steve Hirsch, he gives backers a copy of state law and sample petition from past years. The petition writer has to draft the ordinance language and then has to bring it back for approval to him. Joanne Lahman brought the ordinance to him.

The petitioners waited until after an informational meeting on the project held by City Administrator Austin Gilley on Thursday to turn the document in.

A letter to the editor signed by Mrs. Horn said the group was pushed into filing the petition after the public meeting "turned ugly."

The petition had 189 certified signatures, although it only needed 154, or 40 percent of the registered voters who voted in the last election, which was 386, said Ms. Geihlsler. The Horns and Mrs. Lahman actually collected over 200 signatures, the clerk said, but some of the people are not registered voters or have moved and not changed their addresses on voting records.

Once the petition is presented, the council will then vote to either adopt the ordinance or place it on the ballot. If the ordinance is adopted or passed by election, then it can't be changed for 10 years without another election.

The council has 20 days to decide, or the question will go to a special election, said Mr. Gilley.

Council to discuss petition

The Oberlin City Council will discuss a petition to stop city, state, federal or private money from being spent on a new runway at the municipal airport at its regular meeting Thursday.

As of Monday afternoon, the city hadn't received the petition, but City Administrator Austin Gilley said he had talked with the county clerk. The petition was certified on Friday.

Mr. Gilley said the council will also hear an update on the Cunningham vs. City lawsuit, dealing with the proximity of the new sewer lagoons to land owned by Julie Cunningham south of town.

The council will also look at the latest versions of the standard traffic and ordinance codes, which it does every year. Normally, the state codes are adopted "by reference."

Also, said Mr. Gilley, the council will talk about plans for the city's upcoming 125th Anniversary.

The meeting starts at 7 p.m. and is open to the public.

Leaders split over who should speak at meeting

More than 50 people came for an informational meeting about the city's airport runway expansion project Thursday night at The Gateway, although only a few of them stayed for the entire meeting.

City Administrator Austin Gilley said he set the meeting with the idea of offering information on the project. Mr. Gilley said he was talking with a citizen a couple weeks ago who wanted more information, and he thought they could get everyone in one room and do that.

The meeting, he told those present, isn't meant to be a debate, a discussion or an opportunity for people to speak. Mr. Gilley said he would take questions, but not comments.

During the question-and-answer time, Sharon Addleman asked why Greg Lohofener, with the Oberlin-Deatur County Economic Development Corp., hadn't been allowed to speak since he had information on the project.

Mr. Gilley said if that was what the audience wanted, he would leave and Mr. Lohofener could have the floor. After a little bit of applause, that is what happened.

As Mr. Gilley packed up his computer to leave and Mr. Lohofener started to talk, a little more than half the audience left, including those who were carrying a petition to prohibit spending any money on the runway project.

The Oberlin airport is part of the Federal Aviation Administration's National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems, said Mr. Gilley, which is a good thing.

The city can apply for money through the agency, he said, which makes airport improvements "pretty cheap infrastructure" because the city only has to pay 5 percent of the total cost.

On any project, said Mr. Gilley, good management is essential. There are some problems here

in that area, he said, but they are working on it and it's going to keep getting better.

Part of this project which is really impressive is that Congressman Jerry Moran has the airport project listed on his website for priority funding from the aviation administration. This, however, is not an earmark, where the money isn't tucked into a bill somewhere.

In the 1990s, said Mr. Gilley, the Kansas Department of Transportation came up with a plan that every person should be within 30 miles of a runway for air ambulance service. Out of that came the need for an automated weather observation system, which the city is still working on getting — with a federal grant — 10 years later.

The city has received part of the money from the Kansas Department of Transportation for the weather system. The city has a purchase agreement for the city and will receive the other part of the money when it's installed.

There are also line of sight issues at the current runway; at 3,793 feet the line of sight is too short for a lot of planes and the runway is not in compliance with "runway protection zone" rules. These are projects started back in the 1990s, Mr. Gilley said.

The safety zones are required all around the runway, especially at the ends. The highway and the fairground parking lot are in one of those zones, said Mr. Gilley, which will require the city to cut 615 feet off the south end of the current runway and add 302 feet to the north end. That would leave the existing runway at 3,500 feet, fairly short for newer turboprop planes such as the King Airs used for air ambulances, and way too short for most small jets.

While dealing with this, the airport has become an economic development project, said Mr. Gilley,

with companies pledging to have hangars at the new runway including Bus and Coach International, C&H Power Line and First National Bank.

A 7,000-foot runway would be a really big deal, he said. That would mean Oberlin would have the biggest runway from Salina to Denver. That would set the city apart.

The aviation agency supports part of the project, building a 4,800-foot runway, which Congressman Moran has signed on for as well. The state says it will pitch in \$1 million to help extend the runway.

Design of the new runway is scheduled for 2011 and construction in 2012 for the 4,800- to 5,500-foot runway first phase, said Mr. Gilley, with the extension to 7,000 to come later.

Rehabilitation and relocation of the current runway will be done next year, he said.

There are obstacles with the project, Mr. Gilley said, including whether nearby landowners and the county agree to have the road north of the airport closed. The project will be at a stand still, he said, if the needed landowners don't agree to sell, if the federal agency drops the project for any reason, or if voters approve the potential petition.

From an economic development standpoint, he said, lots of cities are competing for an edge. Infrastructure generally is a good investment.

"Airports," said Mr. Gilley, "directly benefit a few people, but can indirectly benefit a lot of people."

In order for that to happen, he said, the city needs a complete package with car rentals, places to eat and hotels.

The city seems to be in survival management mode, he said, while airports of this size are more part of a development mode. This might be a gold brick thrown to someone who is drowning.

The population is declining, he said, and everyone knows that is a problem. Services will decline to some degree and the population decrease. Any debt taken on for the airport, however, won't decline until it's paid off.

The city has raised taxes for the last five to six years, he said. Taxes will start to reach a threshold and people will start to leave faster. The revenue, said Mr. Gilley, goes down as people leave and those who are still here have to make up the difference. The city is probably at that threshold now.

In three to five years, the administrator said, unless the trend changes, the city will have to make some changes.

Mr. Gilley showed a slide with all players in the process and governance, from the airport advisory committee, which included the engineers, economic development, council, airport manager, administrator, project manager and the committee.

It seems there is some confusion here, he said, and some people don't feel they are represented or listened to. They feel unwelcome and have started a petition.

If it passes, Mr. Gilley said, that would eliminate the need for any additional money or a possible tax increase for the airport. It would also eliminate the airport from being any part of the city's economic development plan.

No matter what happens with the petition, he said, people need to remember not to get personal.

Before taking questions, Mr. Gilley said there are 10 questions weighing on him and the council, including:

- "What is the likelihood of the project ever coming to fruition?"
- Will this project bring people and jobs to Oberlin?
- Is this project Oberlin's "last chance" to survive?

• Should the project be expedited for survival?

• Would this project create a burden too heavy for the city?

• Are there smaller "risks" that need considered first?

• Is binding the city on a specific issue really going to improve things in the long term?

• Is a "slow death" what the majority wants for the city, and if so, can we deal with that?

• How many deeply divisive issues can a small community endure?

• Is this presentation effort helpful or crazy?

On the economic development side, Oberlin's location is a plus, said Mr. Lohofener, since it is half-way across the United States.

The Kansas National Guard, he said, told him that a longer runway would make it easier to get training into town.

If this project is voted down, he said, people are still going to continue paying state and federal taxes, which will still go to the Kansas Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration. That money will then be spent somewhere else, he said, so why not continue paying those taxes and have that money spent here?

"We are going to burn a lot of bridges if the city backs out now," he said, adding that a lot of work has been done by a lot of people to make this project happen, he said.

Mr. Lohofener said he didn't agree with a statement Mr. Gilley made that if people have signed the petition, it's because they are against the project. If they signed the petition because they think taxes are going to go up, he said, that's not the whole story. There is no plan to raise taxes to pay for the airport.

— Kimberly Davis

Attendees raise many questions during airport meeting at The Gateway

During the airport informational meeting Thursday at The Gateway, several people asked questions of the city administrator.

Some of those were more statements or opinions, which Administrator Austin Gilley refused to answer or comment on. Those questions that he could answer, he did, although once he said he didn't know the answer.

Some of those questions included:

• What do you base your assumption that the community doesn't support the project? That's based on the survey data and a petition that has 25 percent of the voting population's signatures on it.

• How many of the items proposed in the \$500,000 stimulus money are contained in the engineer's plan? Hangar improvements, said Mr. Gilley, adding that beyond that he didn't know.

• If the stimulus money comes through for \$500,000, it's 100 percent tax free? Assume yes, he said.

• In that \$500,000 is the fueler and other items not in the plan. This is a time for questions, said Mr. Gilley, not to make statements.

• Will the city lose that 600 feet off the south end of the existing runway regardless of what happens.

• He said the south end will be shortened 600 feet to create a safety zone clear of the highway and the fairground parking lot. The north side will then be extended 300 feet, making the runway 3,500 feet. The grant application is in place for the design of that part of the project, he said, while the grant application for construction is not.

• Given the need for all this matching money, who is going to pick up the tab for insurance, electricity and snow removal? Can Oberlin afford that? If the airport doesn't make enough, said Mr. Gilley, the city would have to increase taxes or divert money from another fund.

• So then why get into a situation like this? That's getting into an opinion, said Mr. Gilley.

• Has the 600 feet at the end of the runway been closed already? Mr. Gilley wasn't sure.

• If that part of the runway is cut off, then air ambulances can't land here anymore? That's why the shift was made, to deal with the existing runway first, including the Automated Weather Observation

System.

• If the petition is in place, will that delay working on the current runway? My interpretation, said Mr. Gilley, is no, because it's already in place, but that would deal with legal interpretation.

• How will we sustain a tax increase when taxes have already increased the last five to six years? The man said he bought his house 39 years ago and there's been a 700 percent increase, adding he has all the taxes he can stand. That's close to a statement, said Mr. Gilley.

• If the petition goes through and the city isn't going to spend any money on the airport for 10 years, what's your feeling of getting money after those 10 years from the Federal Aviation Administration? If this project is voted down and there's a congressman out promoting it, the city runs the risk of a little embarrassment for him. As far as getting money in the future, said Mr. Gilley, he didn't know.

• If the petition goes through, can the project be done by the county? Mr. Gilley said he couldn't speak for the county.

• Why do you think the petition says private money can't be used? You would have to ask the writer, Mr. Gilley said.

• Who wrote the petition? Mr. Gilley said he didn't know but read in the newspaper that the Lahman family helped with it.

• Do you know how many petitions like this have been started in this community? Probably a lot, he said.

• The idea of extending the runway was instigated by Bus and Coach International out of Jennings. Does the city have any concrete commitment from them? Mr. Gilley said he couldn't speak for the company, but thought it wasn't fair to put a lot of pressure on them since they are weathering the same economic times as the rest of us.

• What's the total project cost and what percentage is the city responsible for? About \$12 million

total, with 5 percent for the city to construct it and a little bit more to buy land.

• The Federal Aviation Administration isn't going to pay for the land? The plan is for a 4,800 foot runway, not a 5,500 foot runway, which the land is needed for.

• What is C&H Power Line's commitment if they are leaving the area? Mr. Gilley said he didn't know.

• How much does an election cost? The last general election cost close to \$3,500.

• Who has been the project manager so far? When he started, eight months ago, he said he understood

that he was the project manager. After a couple months, it was decided that might not be the best thing, and now Connie Grafel, economic development director, is the liaison on it. Mr. Gilley said he still isn't real clear on who has all the responsibility there.

• Does Ms. Grafel have any information that wasn't in the presentation? Mr. Gilley said he talked with Ms. Grafel about the best format.

• If we shut this project down, how is that going to help get younger citizens interested in getting involved or staying here. Good statements, Mr. Gilley said.

— Kimberly Davis

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