

Airport ordinance goes to a vote

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**

k.davis@nwkansas.com

The Oberlin City Council voted unanimously Thursday not to accept an ordinance written in the airport petition, sending the decision on whether to spend money on a longer runway to a public vote.

The special election on the issue hasn't yet been scheduled. The council actually doesn't have any say when it will be, said City Attorney Steve Hirsch; that will be up to the county election officer, County Clerk Colleen Geishler. She will also decide whether the polling place at The Gateway will be open

or if the special election will happen through a mail ballot.

Before the council voted not to accept the ordinance, there was

Council Roundup

At the meeting Thursday, the Oberlin City Council:

- Voted unanimously not to accept the ordinance written in the airport petition, which will send the decision to a vote. Story at left.

- Heard that the city utility bills aren't due until the 15th for this month only, since the office will be closed for three days this week. Story to come.

- Held three 30-minute closed sessions to discuss the economic development specialist, but didn't take any action. Story on Page 3A.

- Gave Jack Benton a standing ovation to thank him for his volunteer service with the cable access channel. Story on Page 7A.

some discussion.

Sid Metcalf, chairman of the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., spoke dur-

ing the public comment slot at the beginning of the meeting. He said he had some clarification on where the 7,000-foot runway in the master

plan came from. Mr. Metcalf read an e-mail from Ed Young with the Kansas Department of Transportation to City Administrator Austin Gilley, which said that the 7,000-foot runway might be a realistic target in the distant future. Mr. Young went on to explain that after meeting on the project, he became a "proponent of building an intermediate length and seeing what traffic a good marketing program could lure to Oberlin."

Mr. Metcalf also commented on an e-mail from Mr. Gilley to Mr. Young which said he had an unofficial word from the McCook airport that they would rather "give fuel

away" before letting planes land in Oberlin. Mr. Metcalf said he talked with the man from the McCook airport, who is a good friend of his, and he told him that was absolutely not true and he would come help get the runway here built.

Basically the council has three choices, said Mayor Joe Stanley, to vote no on the ordinance, sending it to an election; or to adopt the ordinance as is with a "yes" vote.

Mr. Gilley said he had consulted with the aviation administrator and the Department of Transportation (See PETITION on Page 8A)

Conversation brings out over 80 people

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**

k.davis@nwkansas.com

Around 80 people gathered last Wednesday to participate in a Decatur Tomorrow "community conversation" about the airport runway extension project.

Some had presentations, some had questions, some had answers and others just wanted to listen.

At the request of the Decatur Tomorrow steering committee, Terry Woodbury, with Public Square Communities, the consultant who helped the strategic planning group organize, was there as the moderator.

Three times the committee has brought together the voices of the community to move forward on projects and get information, he said. Tonight, said Mr. Woodbury, the conversation is focused on different interest groups with knowledge, intelligence and information on the airport project.

There's a tendency when groups form that don't see eye to eye to see things as us and them, he said, but positive comments and talk can help change the world. That doesn't mean that there aren't conflicts along the way.

People representing both the

petitioners against the project and the airport committee were each given 10 to 15 minutes to present comments about the project before people talked and formulated questions in discussions at their tables.

Steve Horn said he and his wife Marilyn didn't start the petition, although they helped carry it. They went out for two days around two to three hours a day and gathered 200 signatures. He said he is representing taxpayers against spending money on a 7,000-foot runway.

In looking at this project, some of the same questions are coming up that have come up with The Gateway, said Mr. Horn. It was said that it would take \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year to run The Gateway, but it actually takes around \$100,000. He said he has the same question about the airport, the cost to run it.

The council, said Mr. Horn, needs to know there are a lot of people who are dissatisfied. They want the city water fixed, not a 7,000-foot runway.

Mr. Horn read through a list of changes between 1991 and today, including fewer business and fewer people, with the city's population down from 2,293 to 1,870.

(See BOTH on Page 8A)

Airport questions answered by many

Community members talked in small groups, around tables set up in the high school cafeteria, last Wednesday, formulating questions about the proposed airport project.

Questions ranged from the cost of the project to why the petitioners didn't say that the ordinance would tie the city's hands for 10 years to why the airport isn't a county or a county/city project.

People had an opportunity to ask questions at their tables first to see if someone knew the answer, then the floor was opened up allowing them to ask the question of the more than 80 people at the "community conversation." The person who was best able to answer that question, whether a city employee,

or a member of the City Council, the airport committee or with the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., answered it.

Questions asked during the conversation included:

- What's going on with the former youth ranch? asked Jay Anderson, a former council member. Is that an airport question? asked moderator Terry Woodbury. When the National Guard was here to look at the ranch as a training site, said Dr. Anderson, they said the airport expansion would help them. The community, said Lee Franklin, airport committee, made a strong impression on the Guard. Instead of waiting for the National Guard (See PEOPLE on Page 8A)

Theater might open in mid-November

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**

k.davis@nwkansas.com

Work is moving forward for a mid-November opening for the new movie theater on Main Street.

Possible opening dates for the theater, said Greg Lohofener, with the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., are Saturday, Nov. 14, or Saturday, Nov. 21.

The group is still \$115,000 short on the money needed to finish the middle third of the building, which will house the theater.

The south third of the building will house the Golden Age Center, and that area is almost done. Mr. Lohofener said a few minor items need to be finished.

The senior lunch and other activi-

ties are still being held across the street at a rented space. Mr. Lohofener said he's not sure when they will move into the new center.

With the corporation being a little short of money to finish the theater, he said, they are still holding fund raisers. Mr. Lohofener said they also have been contacting people about donating money to help finish the project, but the group can't contact everyone.

If someone is interested in donating to the project, he said, they may contact him at 475-3322 or Connie Grafel, marketing director, at 475-2901, or any corporation board member.

Decatur Tomorrow also plans to hold a fund raiser to help get the (See THEATER on Page 8A)



ON SATURDAY, Dana Marintzer (above) helped grill burgers and brats for lunch during the Last Indian Raid Museum's Mini Sapa Celebration. Angie and Roger Wilson (below) ate ice cream floats sold by the Decatur County Helping Hands. — Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

Museum opens for free

The sun was high in the sky as young and old milled in and out of the buildings at the Last Indian Raid Museum on Saturday.

The doors opened bright and early with a pancakes-and-ham feed to celebrate 51 years of the annual fall Mini Sapa Celebration. At 8 a.m., the DCHS Singers stopped in to perform while people ate.

Director Sharleen Wurm said the museum was open all day with free admission. She said she thought they had over 100 people through the buildings, with over 85 signing in at the front door. Not everyone went in the front entrance, she noted, so a few probably didn't sign the book.

Over the noon hour, the board served pork burgers and brats and the Helping Hands organizations sold ice-cream floats.

Mrs. Wurm said she wasn't sure how many people ate breakfast and lunch at the museum, but she thought there were about the same number as past years, since they used about the same number of plates.

The biggest meal, she said, was the taco-salad dinner fund raiser, with the Royal Neighbors doing a match up to \$1,000. Mrs. Wurm said she thought there were over 140 people there for dinner. Having John Juenemann and Myrna Jones perform helped draw people in, she said.

Mrs. Wurm said she's not sure how much money was raised



throughout the day, although the Royal Neighbors will match up to \$1,000.

This is the first year a supper has

been offered during Mini Sapa, she said. The Royal Neighbors, she said, have wanted to hold a fund-raising supper for the museum for

a while.

The money raised throughout the day will go for maintenance and upkeep, she said.

*Petition voted down

(Continued from Page 1A) and included those e-mails to Mr. Metcalf. Mr. Gilley said he was seeking some clarification adding that it's normal to have some confusion about the phasing of a large project.

The city's master plan is for a 7,000-foot runway, he said, but that is only a distant goal.

He said the man he consulted from the aviation administration said if the city is going to get out of the new runway project, now would be the best time to do it.

Mr. Gilley said his recommendation was that if the council thinks Oberlin needs a new and longer runway, to reject this ordinance and hope the voters agree. If the council thinks the runway is risky, he said, it should approve the ordinance and come up with a new plan.

It was fairly clear at the community conversation last Wednesday,

said Connie Grafel, marketing director with the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., that the people supported a 5,500-foot runway. She said the plan is to focus on that.

Councilman Ray Ward made a motion to reject the petition and send the ordinance to a vote. Councilwoman Rhonda May seconded it.

If the council adopts the ordinance, said Councilman Bill Riedel, or if things change in two or three years, the public could vote and the project could proceed. If the ordinance goes to a vote now and is approved, he noted, it can't be changed for 10 years.

Not unless there is another petition, said Mr. Gilley, but the ultimate say on that would come from City Attorney Steve Hirsch, who was reading information on the subject.

If this goes to a vote, said Ms. May, it might help clear the air and let the voters make the decision, but if the council votes on this, it will end in what she said will almost sure be a split vote.

Also, said Councilwoman Marcia Lohofener, everything is in line to go on the runway in the next two years.

Hopefully, people don't get too worked up about this, said Mr. Gilley. There are a lot of realities from a project standpoint that may or may not happen that are out of everyone's control, including land acquisition, money from the federal and state agencies, and others.

True, said Councilman Ward, but if it isn't gone about the right way, it won't matter anyway.

The council voted unanimously to reject the ordinance in the petition, sending it to an election.

*People talk about airport

(Continued from Page 1A) to call, they have been in touch with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and others about training for the ranch. Another idea is something called Youth Challenge, which helps young people get their general equivalency diploma.

The airport is important in all of those, said Mr. Franklin, because it will bring the talented people needed to make those work in and out, cutting down on "windshield time."

• Why is Oberlin being considered as a regional airport and not McCook? How big is the McCook airport? said Susan Nelson, a teacher.

At a meeting in Hays a year ago with the state, said Ms. Grafel, they looked at the state map and what Colby and Atwood had. Decatur County is two counties in from the west, they said, and an airport here would cover Sheridan County. They said Oberlin should be the regional airport. They didn't want to look at Nebraska, Ms. Grafel said, when it could be done in Kansas and benefit this state.

• What is the estimated cost to property owners for the maintenance and debt service for a loan to build the runway? asked Gary Walter, president of the Bank. He gave the example of his house, which he thought had a market value around \$70,000.

City Administrator Austin Gilley said that the projected annual operation and debt cost will be \$50,000, which would probably take an increase of six or seven mills on the property tax levy, but that depends on the valuation. Currently, the city is spending \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year on the runway now, he said, so that would decrease a little.

So, around four mills? asked Mr. Woodbury.

That's around \$50 a year increase, said Mr. Walter. That's just the city taxes though, said Ken Shobe, former mayor, but that doesn't raise the taxes for the school or county.

• Explain the fueling station proposed for here and the one in McCook, asked electrician (and former Councilman) Bob Castle. In McCook, there is a re-fueling truck for jet fuel.

Bob Fraker, airport manager, said

someone would have to operate a fuel truck. The self-service fueler is for light airplanes, he said. Jet pilots, aren't going to fuel their own planes.

• Chuck Frickey, a lawyer and former mayor, asked if they could all get together to get the 4,800-to-5,000 foot runway done, even if the petitioners are against the 7,000 foot one. Steve Horn, who helped carry the petition against the project, said he didn't think anyone who signed the petition was against a 4,800-to-5,500-foot runway. They are against the 7,000-foot project, which is still in the master plan. They signed the petition so that the decision could go to a vote, he said.

• When the petition was presented to her, said Mrs. Nelson, nothing was said about the 10-year freeze. Why wasn't that presented? There was no answer.

• How long does the runway need to be for an air ambulance? said Colleen Gee. County Ambulance Director Linda Manning said she talked with EagleMed and they need a minimum of 3,000 feet, but they have trouble here with lighting and communication. The minimum for a plane from Denver is 5,500 feet, said Ms. Manning.

Gary Anderson, with the steering committee, said Hospital Administrator Lynn Doeden wasn't able to make it to the meeting. Mr. Anderson said Mrs. Doeden did send an e-mail comment. Jess Carter, with the steering committee, said that Mrs. Doeden suggested looking at the big picture, three to five years down the road.

• How long is the current runway, and how long will it be after the changes required to create safety zones at the south end, Mr. Carter asked. Even if the new runway is built, will the rehabilitation still be done on the current one?

Once the rehabilitation is done, said Ms. Grafel, the runway will be 3,500 feet. Regardless of a new runway, this has to be done to keep the old runway in service.

• Why are we asking the people in the city to pay for he airport and not the whole county? said Councilman Bill Riedel. When the project first started, said Dr. Anderson, they looked into doing it as a city/county project and it got more tangled.

The committee just kept working forward.

"That's a good long-term project for you, Bill," he said.

The county, said Commissioner Stan McEvoy, can give no more than \$50,000 for the airport when the time comes, unless the project is taken to a vote.

• Is that \$50,000 a year or a lump sum? asked Shanna Long. The county can only commit to \$50,000 in a year, said Mr. McEvoy.

• Does the county have the \$50,000 for the airport for next year? asked Mr. Horn. The commissioners discussed that a lot, said Mr. McEvoy, and felt the project wasn't going to happen next year, so the money wasn't budgeted.

• What kind of shape is the runway in now and how wide is it? asked Sharon Addleman. The runway needs the lines and numbers painted, said Mr. Fraker. The asphalt will need an overlay in the near future. Newer runways, he said, are concrete, so they need a little less maintenance. The current runway is 50 feet wide, he said, with the rehabilitation to make it 70 feet wide.

• What about the scenario presented by Mr. Gilley for the north/south runway? said Dan Dempewolf, city employee. At the last council meeting, Thursday, Sept. 17, said Mr. Gilley he presented an idea to lengthen the runway to the north, but that was abandoned because of the cost of dirt work.

• What's the status of land acquisition? asked Rusty Addleman. Mr. Gilley said they are trying to tie up land issues for the existing runway and then will work on the land for the new runway.

• Will the city have to pay for that land or will the Federal Aviation Administration? asked Mary Jo Lohofener. Although the federal agency will pay 95 percent of it, said Mr. Gilley, 100 percent of it has to be paid up front by the city. It could be a cash flow problem.

• What's the turnaround on the 95 percent reimbursement? asked Ms. Long. Usually, it can be done in a few days, said Mr. Gilley, but if there are hiccups in the system, it takes longer. He added that when he started with the city, they were around \$260,000 behind in the paperwork for reimbursements.

Fun at Sappa Park



AT SAPPA PARK, Jobey Black played in the Frisbee Golf Tournament on Saturday. The tournament brought out over 25 people to play on the nine-hole course. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

*Both sides tell information

(Continued from Page 1A)

The people who signed the petition, he said, wanted the question to get on the ballot. They were never talking about the existing runway, he said, just the 7,000-foot new one.

"I don't think we have the money to do the runway," said Mr. Horn.

He said he appreciated them letting him come and speak.

Sid Metcalf, with the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., talked about the origins of the project. About three years ago, he said, talk started about expanding the airport. The airport group, he said, got to a place where they could get serious with the Federal Aviation Administration. Although the city's master plan is for a 7,000-foot runway, said Mr.

Metcalf, the airport committee is shooting for a 4,800-foot runway with 95 percent paid for by the federal agency and the 700 feet to get it to 5,500 feet paid for with \$1 million promised by the Kansas Department of Transportation.

If this petition is passed, said Mr. Metcalf, it sends a message to the young people of the community. More people will leave if the community stands still, he said, so those who are left will have to pay more taxes, more for services.

Most air ambulance companies need a balanced runway because of their insurance, he said. Basically that means if a pilot fires up a plane and accelerates and can't take off, they need to have enough runway to be able to stop.

On a sunny day, and Oberlin has

a lot of days over 100 degrees, pilots are dealing with an air-density altitude issue and runway length is a factor in taking off. (Because hot air is less dense, it takes more runway to get a plane airborne in hot weather.)

If the airport project is voted down, he said, the community will be burning bridges with the Federal Aviation Administration, Kansas Department of Transportation and a congressman, all of whom have supported the project.

A lot of people thought that Bus and Coach International coming to Decatur County was the reason for this project, said Mr. Metcalf. The idea of expanding the runway was already being talked about, he said; the bus company just got the group off of dead center.

*Theater still needs money

(Continued from Page 1A) project done. The steering committee will host a dinner and tours of the new building from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 20.

The meal will be served for a donation. Gary Anderson, co-convenor of the committee, said the group hasn't worked out all of the details yet.

People can come have supper at

the center and get a tour and then head to Decatur Community High School at 7:30 p.m. for a vocal concert, he said.

Mr. Lohofener said there will be a work day to paint and put ceiling tiles up on the theater side of the project soon. Anyone who might want to volunteer can call him or Ms. Grafel and then when the work day is set, they will let them know.

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