

City's \$6.7 million budget approved

By STEVE HAYNES

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After a couple of questions and a short dissent by one of its members, the Oberlin City Council approved a \$6.7 million budget, nearly identical to projected spending for this year.

The budget projects a property tax rate of 87.069 mills, up 1.57 mills from this year, an increase of about 1.8 percent.

The budget includes \$1.6 million in the general fund, almost \$182,000 for debt service (to pay outstanding bonds), \$73,000 for the library, \$222,500 for roads and streets in

the special highway fund, \$10,000 for parks and recreation, \$10,000 for tourism promotion, \$20,000 for economic development and \$2,750 to maintain the former Sappa Valley Youth Ranch property.

Enterprise funds, mostly city utilities, include \$510,000 for water, \$2 million for electric and \$291,000 for sewer. The budget for The Gateway civic center is \$263,880, down almost \$52,000 from this year.

During the budget hearing Thursday, no one from the public came forward to question the expenditures or tax rates.

Connie Grafel, city economic develop-

ment marketing director, asked if the budget included money for airport improvements. The general fund includes nearly \$700,000 for airport work, she heard, covering a project to repave and relocate the current north-south runway scheduled for next year.

Last year, the airport budget included \$2 million for runway work in case the city could get federal stimulus money for a new, longer runway, but that did not happen.

Councilman Bill Riedel said he'd heard that Atwood's budget is \$1 million less than Oberlin's, and wondered why. He asked if the city could get a copy of the Atwood

budget, and acting Administrator Karen Larson said she could do that.

Councilman Richard Kimble said he would vote against the budget because the council has not done anything about losses at The Gateway.

"I still think the money for The Gateway is out of line," he said. "I just can't in good conscience see putting \$4,000 a week into The Gateway without any kind of action plan."

The budget shows subsidies at \$150,000 from the electric fund (\$50,000) and from donations (\$100,000) in 2009, \$140,000

from the electric fund this year and \$190,000 (\$90,000 from electric and \$100,000 from donations) next year. Catering and rental income, about \$69,000 last year and \$75,000 this year, is projected at \$105,000 for next year.

Gateway expenses are mostly for payroll (\$148,000 last year and a projected \$152,500 next year) and commodities, such as food (\$75,000 last year and \$88,300 this year), so catering and rental income has not been covering much more than the food, no salaries.

(See COUNCIL on Page 5A)



AT CITY PARK LAST WEDNESDAY, Cynthia Haynes and Tim Davis congratulated Sarah Fredrickson (above), who won the Oberlin Merchants' Big \$1,000 Shopping Spree. On Monday (below), Mrs. Fredrickson looked at a shotgun at Dale's Fish 'N' Fun before she picked the one she wanted. — Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

Winner buys a shotgun

The weather was just about perfect for the annual Back-to-School Picnic last Wednesday evening when an Oberlin woman won \$1,000 in scrip money from Oberlin merchants.

Sarah Fredrickson had the winning entry in the Oberlin Merchants' Big \$1,000 Shopping Spree, which was drawn during the potluck picnic at City Park.

Cynthia Haynes, publisher and business manager of The Oberlin Herald, and Tim Davis, advertising representative, gave the money away. Mr. Davis asked a picnic guest to draw a slip out of a large blue tub filled with entries. The first name drawn was Cecil Hess, but she wasn't at the picnic. The second was from Sarah Fredrickson, who was present.

Mrs. Fredrickson said it was a great anniversary gift, since she and her husband Gary celebrated 25 years of marriage on Aug. 10.

She said she didn't know what she would spend all of the money on, but planned to buy a shotgun at Dale's Fish 'N' Fun so that she could hunt this fall.

On Monday, Mrs. Fredrickson headed to the outdoor store on U.S. 36. She ordered a Remington 12 gauge, which has to be shipped. Mrs. Fredrickson did manage to spend just under \$200 on two pairs of sneakers for herself, however.

She said she then headed downtown, where she bought a cover for a Traeger grill from R&M Service Center, a Kansas State University pitcher from Ward Drug Store and a set of steak knives from Stanley Hardware.

Mrs. Fredrickson said she has around \$200 left and plans to buy



a few subscriptions to *The Oberlin Herald* and some little Christmas stocking stuffers.

She thanked *The Herald* and all the sponsoring businesses for the shopping spree and the Chamber

of Commerce for the picnic.

All of the scrip money has to be spent by the last day of the month at the sponsoring businesses. No purchase was required to enter the drawing.

Sponsors included Dale's Fish 'N' Fun, Culligan Water Conditioning, Ward Drug Store, Stanley Hardware, R&M Service Center and *The Herald*.

City Council declares houses as dangerous

By STEVE HAYNES

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The Oberlin City Council declared two houses as dangerous buildings Thursday, giving the owners 30 days to either fix them up or tear them down before the city does the job for them.

A third structure, a business building downtown on Hall Street, got a different treatment. The owner, Kenneth Morgan, appeared with a contractor, Jerry Stein, and promised that his building, an old seed house at 113 W. Hall, would be fixed by fall. The council gave him 90 days to do the work, though he said it shouldn't take that long.

Code enforcement officer Jan Ackerman of Hoxie showed photos of the rear of the building, where a thick masonry wall has collapsed, allowing access to the interior. Mr. Morgan said he planned to have

the existing wall torn out and a new wall put up behind it, shortening the building but closing it in.

Mayor Joe Stanley said he was afraid the wall might collapse, taking out a power pole serving several nearby buildings. Mr. Morgan said the new back wall had already been started.

Councilwoman Rhonda May moved to declare the building dangerous, giving the owner 90 days to make repairs, and the council agreed 5-0.

"I think our goal here is to be sure that all the buildings in our town are safe," said Councilman Rob McFee. "It's to be sure that if kids play where they're not supposed to, they'll be safe."

Councilman Bill Riedel asked Mr. Morgan if he could put up some fence to keep kids out of the building (See OWNERS on Page 5A)

Streets pinpointed in engineers' report

By STEVE HAYNES

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The city's engineers outlined a survey of city streets, pinpointing about 30 blocks as "high priority" for repaving, at a City Council meeting Thursday. That could cost up to \$2.25 million at current prices, but there's no plan to do anything yet.

Lance Harter and David Blau of Miller and Associates of McCook gave the council a map showing the type of pavement of each block of city streets and the problem blocks.

The engineers have some recommendations on about \$20,000 worth of priority repairs the city could make right away to preserve some of its better pavement also.

More than half the bad surface was on streets which were never paved, just sealed with oil and sand again and again over the years. This "bituminous" surface mostly starts at curb level and builds up, Mr. Harter said, and that creates bumps many drivers complain about.

Because the base was never worked and these streets lack the four to six inches of pavement that concrete, brick and asphalt streets have, he said, they're more prone to failure.

Most of the city's "through" streets, including Hall, Commercial, Wilson, Martin and Penn,

has little or no bad pavement, the engineers' map showed. However, a three-block stretch of Columbia Street from U.S. 83 to the Decatur County Hospital shows as a priority for repair. So does the block of Commercial west of U.S. 83.

No brick streets made the priority list, but about six blocks of concrete pavement is shown as needing replacement.

For immediate work, Mr. Harter told the council, the city should reseal cracks and expansion joints on all the concrete streets. This will preserve the pavement by keeping water out, he said, but some of the old seal may have to be routed out. That could cost \$800 to \$1,000 per block for 16 blocks, he added, or about \$13,000 to \$16,000.

Also, he said, the city needs to seal wide cracks in the asphalt around The Gateway, including Morgan Drive, Fairway and Elm. That could be \$3,000 to \$4,000. And he said, the road into Sappa Park needs to be sealed.

He told the council he thinks concrete paving is a better deal, though it's slightly more expensive than asphalt—\$75,000 per block compared to \$65,000. For one thing, he said, there's no local supplier of asphalt, but there is a concrete plant.

Councilman Bill Riedel noted (See STREETS on Page 5A)

Commissioners discuss money for recreation

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

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The Decatur County commissioners talked last Tuesday about giving money for a countywide recreation program and a year-around director, but made no decisions.

Deanna Castle and Greg Lohoefer, who have been helping with a project to plan a recreation program, talked with the commissioners about the idea last week.

For several months, a group of volunteers has been working on a recreation program for the county. The commissioners now pay over

\$5,000 per year for a summer ball program and a part-time director.

Mrs. Castle said the group contacted several coaches, but they don't want to be in charge of the organization. This program could help enhance the community for younger families who are interested in living here, she said.

There are a lot of younger and middle-aged people who want to be (See GROUP on Page 5A)



*Group wants money

(Continued from Page 1A) involved in activities, she said. The county has already been spending money on recreation, she said. The group is asking for that money to be put into this program. The proposed budget sheet for the recreation program has \$15,000 from the county and also from the city.

Commissioner Gene Gallentine asked if the group planned to have a full-time director right away. Mrs. Castle said they would like to start with a part-time employee and then have the program evolve into a full-time job.

Mr. Gallentine said the commissioners had talked about this program. He said he thought they had agreed that the county would agree to contribute what is being paid already.

The group talked about forming a recreation commission. By state law, said County Attorney Steve Hirsch, a recreation commission could be formed by the city and school district after an election.

In Tribune, which has a year-around program, said Commissioner Stan McEvoy, they formed a recreation foundation. The Decatur County group has received advice from Tribune and Greeley County on the recreation group there.

Mr. McEvoy said he's in favor of the year-around program, as the county ball program has kind of been suffering the last few years.

Maybe forming a recreation commission is something to look at in the spring, said Commissioner Ralph Unger, with the election coming up.

First out of the gate, said Mr. Gallentine, the county could provide what it's doing now for the ball program.

The county's general fund budget is strapped, said Mr. Unger. He said he, too, would be comfortable committing to what the county is giving now.

When the county starts working on the budget, said Mr. McEvoy, the commissioners will know more.

Christmas at Prairie Dog Park



HELPING HIS FRIEND FROSTY stand up to the strong Kansas winds, Robert Groneweg (above) took part in the seventh annual Prairie Dog Christmas at the Prairie Dog State Park last weekend. Spirited decorating won him and his wife Judy a tie for second place in the competition.

— Herald photo by Dana Paxton

*Council OK's proposed budget

(Continued from Page 1A) Most funds showed similar spending, allowing for changes in capital items such as equipment and construction. The budget shows no capital outlay in the general fund, where the city has spent \$158,000 and \$126,000 the last couple of years.

Transfers from the electric fund to the library (\$34,000 last year and

\$9,000 this year) would be eliminated. The transfer to the special street fund for eliminating bumps and rough spots would go from \$50,000 last year and \$65,000 this year to \$75,000 next year.

And the transfer to the general fund would be \$75,000.

The budget passed on a 4-1 vote.

*Owners get 90 days to improve buildings

(Continued from Page 1A) for now, and he agreed.

The next structure was a vacant basement house at 608 N. Neill Ave., owned by Evan and Judy Goltl of Hill City, former owners of an Oberlin business.

Mrs. Ackerman showed photos of the lot, where lilac bushes obscure the house and a cistern or well with an open cover. She said holes in the roof allowed access to the inside.

The owners promised to have it filled in, she said, but that didn't happen. At the last contact, she said, they indicated they'd let the city take care of the house. The council voted 5-0 to condemn the house, giving the owners until Sept. 30 to make repairs.

If nothing is done, Mrs. Larson said later, the city can hire a contractor and bill the owners for the cost of the work. An unpaid charge would go on the tax bill for the land, he said.

The third structure was a house at 303 E. Hall owned by Ed and Vivian Russ of WaKeeney, former Oberlin residents.

Photos showed broken windows, bricks from chimneys which had collapsed and construction materials and debris in the yard.

"There's a lot of places for rodents and snakes," said Mrs. Ackerman. A petition from neighbors asked

the city to do something about the house. One, Phyll Cramer, said the basement had flooded about 10 years ago and he wasn't sure it had ever been dried out.

"This is an old house," he said. "They tell me it's one of the oldest houses in Oberlin."

Mrs. Ackerman said there had been no response to certified letters about the condition of the property. The council gave the owners until Sept. 30 to make repairs.

The owner of another property, a house at 302 W. Hall, has pretty well cleaned up the lot, the officer said.

The city is only looking at properties where citizens have complained since Mrs. Ackerman started her job in the late spring. So far, the council has told her not to look for properties, but to concentrate on ones where the city has complaints.

Mrs. Larson said, however, that citizens had complained about three more properties by Monday as word of the council action spread.

Mrs. Ackerman also has processed 29 weed complaints, Mrs. Larson said, and 27 of the owners took care of the problem. Those who don't mow, she said, the city crew probably will do it and the city will send a bill.

*Streets need re-bricked, re-paved

(Continued from Page 1A) that the city expects to have an asphalt plant in town next year when the airport runway is repaved.

Mr. Harter said the city could take bids with alternates, including using the old curbs or replacing them. The curbs mostly are in pretty good

shape, he said, but when a contractor does a concrete street, it costs little more to get new curbing.

Council members asked about brick paving, but the engineers had no answers. It's not done much, they said, but probably would be at least half again more than concrete.

Mr. Harter said he would work up more detailed estimates of the three immediate projects for the council. The city put aside \$75,000 from the electric fund in the new budget for pavement work, but someone noted, that's only one block of new paving.

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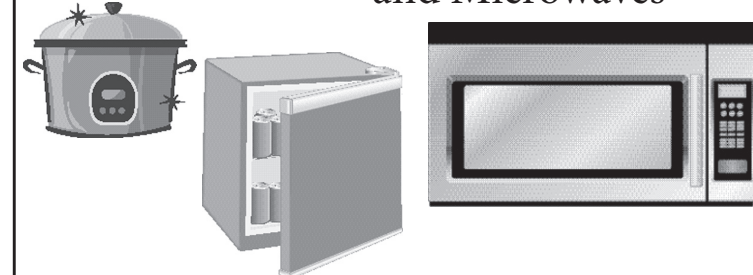
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