

* City agrees to change ordinance

truly "blighted," and not just a little messy, said Mayor Bill Riedel.

He said the rewording of the ordinance was an effort to eliminate subjectivity from the process.

"We thought that by having a complaint process with two signatures, then that would determine a genuine complaint and not just someone who is mad at their neighbor."

Mrs. Ackerman pointed out that the amendment made it so that she couldn't make complaints, because she doesn't actually live in the City of Oberlin. The current ordinance requires the complainant and the co-signer to both be residents.

"I'm not going to stand here and say I never make a mistake," she said. "Sometimes I get an address wrong. Three years ago, I started with Oberlin, and we had three properties ready for demolition. I started the Connections program and placed all three properties with new owners, and they all got fixed. That saved about \$30,000 for the city."

"We need this town to sparkle. I want them to say, as they're driving through Oberlin, 'This looks like a good place to live and expand.'"

"I believe that having neighbors file complaints like this is pitting neighbor against neighbor," she said.

Councilman Rob McFee disagreed, saying that Mrs. Ackerman's duties were subjective, and that is what the council was trying to eliminate from the process.

"I would really like everyone to read a copy of the ordinance," Mr. Riedel said. "It is very subjective. For example, it says no wood pile. Does that mean firewood too?"

"What you guys call subjective isn't what I do," Mrs. Ackerman replied. "What I do is common sense. If there's a woodpile that's

disorderly, I write a courtesy letter first, then a second warning. And that's all before the notice to abate. This council doesn't let me do that. You've got the word subjective in your mindset, and that's not what I do."

"I don't know if this was the right decision," Councilman Josh Williby said, regarding the change. "If you hire people, you have to let them do their job."

"It's funny," an audience member piped up. "Norton doesn't have any houses to rent or buy, and neither does Atwood. A group of businessmen have torn down blighted buildings and cleaned up their town. We have to recruit people, and I think if people drive through this town, they won't think the residential area is very nice. People have made comments that are very negative."

"Those other communities have driven all the renters to this one because they are tearing down those buildings," Mr. Williby replied.

Mrs. Ackerman confirmed that the two towns are putting up new dwellings.

"But once you start tearing down buildings," Mr. Williby countered, "that's one step closer to having vacant lots."

Councilman Rusty Addleman said the solution would need to be "either/or — either we let her do her job, or we keep the two-signature guidelines."

In the end, the council compromised. They ended up keeping the two-signatures clause and adding that the enforcement officer also could file complaints.

"It's going to be like the dog catcher again," Mr. McFee said. "Every time he writes a ticket, someone is up here to complain."

"But a community needs this," Mr. Williby said.

* Grave flowers saved

(Continued from Page 1A) city anything. He also pointed out that Mr. Tally was from Oberlin and moved back here to support the town.

Linda Manning suggested that from now on, a committee of people from Oberlin should take over cleaning up old flowers and decorations.

Mr. Riedel agreed, and the council encouraged the idea. At least four

women in the audience said they would be willing to help.

Mr. Tally said he kept many of the decorations that appeared in good condition, and said the owners could come get them. Mrs. Larson said they would set up an area so anyone who wanted can pick up their flowers through next Wednesday.

Anyone with questions should call the city office at 475-2217.

Keeping cool by the pool



AT THE CITY POOL ON MONDAY, Isiaha Tucker (left) talked with Caleb Hileman by the diving blocks.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

Drought officially declared

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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It's nothing new to hear that there is a building drought in Decatur County, but what does it mean when a public official declares it so?

Gov. Sam Brownback did just that Tuesday in Topeka, noting that every county in Kansas now is in some stage of drought. Decatur numbered among the 36 in "emergency" status, the most severe. Other counties are either in "drought warning" or "drought watch."

Most of what the official declaration says is stating the obvious — there's a drought, take the appropriate measures.

According to the executive order, being in "emergency drought status," means that the governor may authorize use of surplus water from storage in reservoirs and state lakes — all downstream from us.

Tracy Streeter, the director of the Kansas Water Office, said that most relief is likely to come through the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Farm Service Agency. The director of the agency, he said, should have reviewed the damages

by Tuesday, and if a county shows a loss of 30 percent of crops or more due to the drought, farmers there will qualify for federal help.

Mr. Streeter pointed out that so far, no news of Decatur County had showed up in Emergency Services, and that is good news.

If it goes far enough, the state can ask that the president declare a county a national disaster area, he said, which could bring the Federal Emergency Management Agency into the picture.

"There are certain steps that need to be taken for federal disasters," said Katie Patterson-Ingels of the

Water Office. "Certain things need to be done. Once the declaration is announced, the Farm Service Agency and U.S. Department of Agriculture will be able to take the next steps to declare a federal disaster."

So in concrete terms, what can the state offer?

Streeter said that it's difficult to say. Decatur is not near any reservoirs, so bringing water in would be difficult.

But, aside from getting Decatur County that much closer to federal aid, he couldn't say what benefits we will see from the proclamation.

County approves noxious weed control plan

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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Decatur County commissioners approved the annual noxious-weed management plan, showing minimal differences from last year's.

Weed Control Department Director Gaylen Huntley said at the meeting June 12 that the amount of noxious weeds this year is average. They are coming out earlier because

of the dry, hot weather, he said.

Huntley said it's important for landowners to remember to take care of any noxious weeds they may see before they go to seed, particularly musk thistle.

Musk thistle goes to seed twice a year and needs to be taken care of every spring and fall.

"Always kill it as soon as you see it," he said, "but when it's com-

* State official to visit

(Continued from Page 1A)

The attorney general acts as a legal counsel to local governments and handles cases that directly involve the state or take up more resources than a county can handle. The office handles cases that involve child endangerment, consumer protection and antitrust regulation, Mr. Schmidt said, plus criminal appeals and civil suits on behalf of the state and operates a victim compensation program.

"We do a lot of criminal work," he said, "but most of what we do is civil representation of the state. We have jurisdiction that is similar to a district attorney. The difference is that we only get a case if it is referred to us. What that tends to mean is that the bulk of the work is from the mid-size and smaller jurisdictions when there's a conflict or a case that will take up a lot of resources."

Mr. Schmidt said that last summer he came through Decatur County and ended up in the Firemen's Fun Day parade in Jennings.

"We stopped there and had burgers and hot dogs, got in the parade and were with the firemen in the firehouse," he said, laughing. "I couldn't believe it, but it was a lot of fun."

When asked what he thought he could do for Decatur County, Mr. Schmidt said that he hoped to provide good legal services and investigative support when the county calls on his office, and that he was particularly concerned with consumer protection.

"When I was starting out (as a lawyer), one of my first stints was as an assistant attorney general with consumer protection," he said, "and it was very satisfying work. At the end of the day, there's just nothing quite as frustrating as being ripped off."

Mr. Schmidt said he is looking forward to coming out west.

"Getting out there, it just helps keep you grounded," he said. "It keeps you connected to your people."

pletely bloomed out, it's almost impossible to kill."

Noxious weeds found in Decatur County, Mr. Huntley said, include musk thistle, field bindweed, Canada thistle, Johnson grass, bur ragweed, spotted knapweed, hoary cress and jointed goat grass.

He said his office, at 504 E. Victoria St., by the old county shop, has a book to help folks identify weeds.

U.S. 36 set for chip seal

Contractor crews will begin sealing U.S. 36 in Norton County today from the county line to the K-383 junction about six miles west of Norton.

Workers will put down a conventional asphalt chip seal, filling in surface defects and cracks that can shorten the life of asphalt pavement.

Workers will spread a thin layer of asphalt over the road, then coat it with a layer of rock chips that is pressed into place with rollers.

The process is an economical method intended to extend the life of the roadway, said Kristen Brands, district manager of public affairs for the Kansas Department of Transportation in Norton.

Flaggers and a pilot car will guide one-lane traffic through the work zone, she said, with delays of 15 minutes or less expected.

For information, contact Area 1 Construction Engineer Jim Riener at (785) 543-2163 or jriener@ksdot.org, or Brands at (785) 877-3315 or kristenb@ksdot.org in Norton.



Reclaim your old flowers from the Oberlin Cemetery from 10:00 a.m. Monday, July 16, to 10:00 a.m. Thursday, July 19, south of the cemetery shed on the east side.

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