

Tax rate could jump for the city

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
sdecamp@nwkansan.com
 The City of Oberlin's property tax could go up by 8 mills from last year, the City Council decided at a budget workshop last month.

A mill is one-thousandth of a dollar, or \$1 of tax for every \$1,000 of assessed value on real estate and taxable personal property, such as cars and boats.

To put that into perspective, say your home has an appraised value, for tax purposes, of \$5,000. (This is

much less than its sale, or market, value) For every \$1,000 of value, you will be charged \$1, or \$5 in property tax every year, if the property tax were only 1 mill. But the estimated property tax as decided at the meeting July 19 is set to be 85.9 mills, so that house valued at \$5,000 now has a city property tax bill of \$429.50.

That may sound high, but the other side of the coin is that this budget, and this property tax, is lower than that of two years ago, City Admin-

istrator Karen Larson said.

"This is one of the best budgets we've put out," Mrs. Larson said. "We've been able to understand our accounting system, and since we do have a certified public account (Steve Zodrow) now, we have a clear picture from which to make decisions. Steve works hard to make sure there's no overspending, and that expenses are in their correct accounts."

One big change in the budget, she said, was that all the utility

funds were left intact. This is the first time in recent years that the council hasn't taken anything from the electric fund to pay for other projects.

"In order to spend money as a municipality, we have to set a budget," Mrs. Larson said. "We're setting our spending limits for 2013 by fund."

This is based around two principles, Mr. Zodrow said. First, there is the Kansas cash-basis law, which says that a city cannot spend more money than it has. Then there

are state budget regulations, which say that a city cannot spend more from any fund than what it sets in its budget.

The city's total debt, as of Jan. 1, was \$6,303,928. That includes water system improvements (\$665,300), total general obligation bonds (\$4,473,000), and money owed to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment for the wastewater treatment system (\$1,165,628).

The Gateway was the biggest subject of debate for the council,

as it is projected to lose \$75,000 next year.

In the end, the council decided to pull \$75,000 from the Bremer fund, which came from a large donation given to the city by Fred and Henrietta Bremer in their will for upkeep and improvements to the civic center. The members also moved \$25,000 from the sewer fund into The Gateway fund, just to be sure they had expenses covered, and to make sure there would be some

(See TAXES on Page 5A)

Public meeting set to discuss proposed budget

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
sdecamp@nwkansan.com
 The Oberlin City Council will have a public hearing to approve a proposed \$4.8 million budget for 2013, with an estimated property-tax levy of 85.9 mills, which will be an 8-mill hike.

Because the city cut its tax rate last year to give taxpayers a break, officials said, taxes will be going up about 10 percent this year—but will still be lower than two years ago.

Last year, said city administrative assistant Steve Zodrow, the city cut the property tax to give people a break. This year, it will be returning to a more "normal" level, but still about 1 mill less than it was in 2011.

A "mill" is one one-thousandth of a dollar. It equals \$1 of tax for every \$1,000 of tax-value property assessment. You can multiply the tax rate in mills by the assessed valuation of a house (not the market value, which is much higher) and get the tax total.

Next year, if the proposed budget is adopted, the total will be 85.9 mills. In 2012, the city saw a dip, with a break on property taxes and the total mill levy at 77.9. The 2011

property tax rate was a little higher, at 87.01. In 2010, it was 87 mills.

The budget amount of expenditures for 2013 coming from property taxes is \$53,856 higher than this year, which is why the property tax is jumping by 8 mills, Mr. Zodrow.

"The reason we were able to lower the mill levy so much for last year, when it went down to 77.9 mills," said Mr. Zodrow, "is because we were burning up some cash that carried over from the previous year. So we knew that the levy was going to have to come back up, but we wanted to give everyone a break."

"This year, (those taxes) are actually slightly lower (at 85.9 mills) than they were two years ago, when the levy was 87.01. So what looks like a tax hike is really just getting back to normal."

The tax levy in the budget is only an estimate, however. The final tax levy rate for the 2013 budget won't be official until November, when the assessed valuation of the city can be calculated, Mr. Zodrow said.

The council set a public hearing on the budget at 7 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway so that people can discuss the proposed increases, spending and fund transfers.

Benefit cookout planned for today

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
sdecamp@nwkansan.com
 A benefit cookout for Decatur County firefighters, emergency workers and volunteers will be held from 5:30 to 7 p.m. tonight at City Park to raise money for new fire trucks.

Everyone is welcome to the picnic, that is to honor both the firefighters and the volunteers who battled the recent spat of wildfires, ensuring that no homes or lives were lost.

Burgers, polish sausages, hotdogs and watermelon will be served, organizers said, and people are advised to bring their own lawn chairs. The Oberlin Area Concert Band will perform at 6 p.m.

"Our most critical need right now is the trucks," said Fire Chief Bill Cathcart.

The county needs eight more replacement firetrucks on top of

the one they ordered this summer, he said. The trucks that the Decatur County Fire Department has now range from a 1978 model to a 2000, and the department has 12 trucks in all.

"The total bill will be a little over a million," Mr. Cathcart said. "They're about \$100,000 a piece, and we're trying to get new (as opposed to used) trucks."

"The fires are different now, and hotter than they use to be," he said, noting that farmers now plant new seed directly into the old stubble for water conservation. While this has helped advance farming, he said, in a drought year like this it only creates more fuel for a fire.

For information on the picnic or to make a donation, call Shirley Shields during the day at 475-3293, or Dianne Bremer in the evening at 475-2973.



Workers set up the rides

VOLUNTEERS SET UP rides, repaired machines, and organized toys Saturday in preparation for the upcoming Decatur County Fair and Home-Owned Carnival. Carrie Morford (above left) and Holly Gallentine painted. Baron Green (right) set up a game while Mason Berry, (below) the youngest volunteer at 12 years old, poses with one of the new plush toys.

— Herald staff photos by Stephanie DeCAMP



Polls to be open for primary election

Kansas Republican primary elections, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday, will decide who will run in the general election to serve as Decatur County's state representative, magistrate judge of the 17th District and county commissioner of the 2nd District.

People can vote by advance ballot by going to the county clerk's office on the second floor of the courthouse on Hall Avenue and filling out a ballot for County Election Officer Colleen Geihlsler by noon on Monday.

For those planning on voting Tuesday, here's where to go:

- The Gateway in Oberlin: Voters who live in Altory, Bassettville, Beaver, Logan, Cook, Finley, Harlan, Liberty, Center, Oberlin, Olive, Prairie Dog, Roosevelt, Sappa,

Sherman and Summit townships, as well as Oberlin City Precincts 1 and 2.

- The Norcatour City Hall: Residents of Garfield, Grant and Lincoln townships, as well as the City of Norcatour.

- The Sunflower Senior Center in Jennings: Residents of Allison, Pleasant Valley and Jennings townships, as well as the City of Jennings.

- The Dresden United Methodist Church: Residents of Custer, Lyon and Dresden townships, as well as the City of Dresden.

The races for commissioner in District 2 and magistrate judge should be decided in the primaries because both candidates for each job are Republicans. (See BALLOTS on Page 5A)

City finds two wells with good, plentiful water

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
sdecamp@nwkansan.com

The city has tested three more well sites for drinking water, and two of them showed good water in usable amounts.

The results of the third well testing should be announced at this week's city council meeting, at 7 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway.

When combined with previously approved sites, the city now has at

least three good well locations—just enough that Oberlin's water search may have finally found its light at the end of the tunnel.

What's more, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Administration has offered to review a money package that could provide a grant to help pay for new wells and pipelines to town, said Chris Miller of Miller and Associates, the engineering firm out of

Nebraska that has been planning the city's water project.

The city has been offered a package that could include forgiveness of part of a previous loan, as well as money from a state drinking water revolving loan fund.

So not only has the city possibly found its new wells, but being accepted for the loan package could save millions of dollars over the terms of the loans, Mr. Miller said.

The money package could give the city a grant for up to 30 percent of the project cost, and a loan with a shorter payback term (of 20 years) and a lower interest rate (2.3 percent) than the old package, he said.

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