

# Council approves wish list items for departments

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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With Oberlin's 2013 city budget projected to be \$4.3 million, you may be wondering where all that money is going. Aside from the regular expenses that occur every year, the answer is this: Everything on the city's "wish list" was approved.

"This is one of the best budgets we've put out," said City Administrator Karen Larson. "We've been able to understand our accounting system, and since we do have a certified public accountant now (Steve Zodrow, who used to be one of the city's auditors), we have a clearer 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 thing she pointed out is all the utility funds will be left intact. Usually, Mrs. Larson said, money made by the city from electric, water and other utilities ends up being spent on other projects.

This is the first time in many years that the council hasn't planned to take anything from the electrical fund, Mr. Zodrow said.

The "wish list" includes these expenditures for 2013, which will come from the general fund unless otherwise indicated:

- \$100,000 to \$125,000 to contract for electrical pole, wire and transformer replacements, to be paid by the electric fund.
- \$45,000 to widening and strengthening the Penn Avenue bridge over Sappa Creek so it can be a truck route. This needs to be done so that trucks carrying grain can get to the Decatur Co-op elevator without wearing down the brick streets, Mrs. Larson said.
- The project began last week and needs to be done before corn harvest starts, she said. The council determined that this money will actually come out of the 2012 special highway budget, but it was included in the

- 2013 wish list, in the event that another project like it should arise next year.
- The police department will get \$27,000 for a new patrol car. The car will cost \$25,000, with modifications costing \$2,000.
- \$25,000 for the airport for new utilities services to the terminal building, hangars and an upgrade to the septic system.
- Another \$25,000 will buy a pickup with a snow blade for the electrical department to replace the current one. This expense will come out of the regular maintenance fund for electrical expenditures, as it will also be used to maintain the streets and alleyways

- the electric cherry-pickers need to use when problems arise in winter.
- \$9,000 for a lawn mower, with the money to come from the equipment fund.
- The cemetery will get \$6,500 from the memorial fund for wiring the new electronic directory and a gazebo to house it.
- The street department will get \$5,000 for curb-and-gutter repair downtown, from the street budget.
- \$1,500 will be set aside for new trees at the parks, from the park budget.

## City of Oberlin has \$6.3 million of debt

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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Oberlin's total city debt as of Jan. 1 was \$6.3 million. The city's total budget for next year— which includes every dollar needed to run and improve the city — is about \$4.8 million, City Council members heard during a budget workshop.

The city's overall debt limit, under state law, is recalculated every year, and for 2013, it's \$2.6 million, said certified public accountant Steve Zodrow. Those funds are then made available for other projects, such as a new swimming pool.

The city's debts break down into three categories:

- General obligation bonds, issued primarily for water system improvements, total \$665,300.
- Revenue bonds and temporary notes, issued to pay for the water treatment plant the city was going

to build, \$4,473,000.

- Money owed to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment for the new wastewater treatment lagoon system, \$1,165,628.

The city issues bonds as a way of borrowing money to pay for big projects. Investors buy the bonds because the interest on them is exempt from federal, and sometimes state, income tax, said Mr. Zodrow.

The city goes out and sells a municipal bond issue on the financial markets, he said. To the buyers, it is an investment in the city, and to the city, it is a more manageable way of financing large projects.

Temporary notes are a way of borrowing money in advance of financing a project with bonds, he said.

The water treatment project was abandoned last year when the (then newly elected) council discovered

it could cost about \$100,000 a year just to dispose of the uranium the plant would accumulate, and that even after that uranium had been transported to a storage site, the city could still be liable for it were it to later be involved in a toxic pollution incident.

That money has since been used for the current water project, which has been locating wells and will eventually build a pipeline to bring better drinking water to the city. But the deadline for the city to have solid answers to its water problem, and start paying those bonds and notes back, is coming up. The entire debt is expected to be about \$5.4 million, City Administrator Karen Larson said.

Now the city is trying to get a new loan from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's Kansas Public Water Supply Fund

that would repay this debt, and provide the city with additional money to build the water field and pipeline. The city may be able to tap into a federal grant program, which depending upon how well the project fits and the number and size of other projects the agency has, could provide debt forgiveness of between 30 and 60 percent of the loan amount, Mr. Zodrow said, meaning the city won't have to repay all the money. A decision on the request, however, will not be announced until October.

If that new loan and grant are secured, it would knock \$1.62 million off of the city's debt. As administrator Karen Larson said, "It's encouraging news."

## Gateway continues to cost city money

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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Of all the expenses the city has to pay every year, one that often causes the most controversy is The Gateway, the civic center built after the city got a \$1 million gift from the estate of Madonna Morgan.

"By its very nature," said city administrative assistant Steve Zodrow, "it doesn't make money. It is the most difficult operation to close the financial gap on. The difference between what it takes in and what it costs to run ... it's hard to operate when there's so much overhead due to the size of the building."

"If we were to charge for the use of it in the amount we need to run it, no one would be able to afford it."

In fact, the bulk of the discussion during a budget workshop at the city council meeting July 12 (ironically, at The Gateway, which now houses city offices and meetings) was how to provide money to pay the \$75,000 that the center will require to keep going next year.

Lately, the money has largely come out of what's known as the Bremer Fund. The fund came from a gift given to the city in the wills of Fred and Henrietta Bremer, for upkeep and and improvements to the center.

"It was a little over a million when it was given, but it was

dispersed in payments over about two years," said Mr. Zodrow.

The fund now has about \$482,000, he said.

"We've continued to make cuts and become more efficient," Mrs. Larson said at the meeting. "We've been able to accomplish projects to be proud of, but The Gateway is our child that we need to get extra money for."

This year, she said, the entire \$75,000 came from the Bremer Fund, with an additional \$25,000 from the sewer fund transferred to act as a sort of nest egg for the facility. Ideally, she said, that money will not be needed next year, and will roll over into the 2014 budget to continue The Gateway's operation.

While that is a fix for now, the council as a whole was concerned about what will happen when the Bremer money runs out, as Mr. Zodrow predicts it will in about five years.

In prior years, the city tapped the once-profitable electric fund to keep The Gateway going, but that source is drying up, too.

"The city's general fund is financially strapped, electric-fund reserves are being depleted and the Gateway's total receipts won't keep up with total expenditures," said Mr. Zodrow. "The damn thing's so big, we don't know quite what to do with it. It can't sustain itself."

## Men want names of medical workers

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**  
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Four Oberlin men have started sending out letters and trying to gather names of people who might be interested in practicing medicine at the Decatur County Hospital and the Decatur Health Systems Family Practice Clinic.

Pete Zander, a hospital board member, said he asked John Juenemann, Kurt Vollertsen and Gaylord Shields to help with the task. Mr. Zander said the group has no authority but thought they could help come up with some names that might work.

At a board meeting last Monday, Mr. Juenemann said their objective is to try to find any doctor or practitioner who might be interested in coming to Oberlin. He said he wrote a letter to Dr. John Kelley, a medical doctor in Clay Center, who graduated from Decatur Community High School in 1987. He said he also sent an e-mail to his daughter, who is in the medical field, asking if she knew of any possibilities.

Mr. Zander said if they get any names, they will pass those to hospital Administrator Lynn Doeden, who is no longer doing

recruiting, but will still do the hiring.

Board member Ruth Wolfram thought this was a great idea, she said. The more the merrier when it comes to searching for a doctor.

Mr. Zander said he has also gone online and looked for the best medical schools for primary care. He said he found that the University of Colorado in Denver is No. 5 on the list, and he would like to go there and talk to them. This is something he has time to do, he said, that Mrs. Doeden doesn't.

Mrs. Doeden said that she thinks that is wonderful. She also said that they have received two applications for the recruiter position.

Mrs. Wolfram said that if Mrs. Doeden needs help writing letters, making phone calls or doing any of that kind of recruiting in the meantime, she might be able to help, too.

Board chairman Pam Wilson said she talked with the board members of the Decatur County Health Care Foundation about helping pay for a hospital recruiter.

## \*Taxes may jump for city residents

(Continued from Page 1A)

money to carry over into the next year.

While this is a good fix for now, the council as a whole is worried about what will happen when the Bremer Fund runs out, as it is could

in about five years.

"The general fund is facing significant deficits, money and reserves are being depleted, and the total receipts won't keep up with total expenditures," said Mr. Zodrow.

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## Patriotic colors wanted

Four Oberlin women, saying they hope to counter the political apathy typical of an election year, have decided to challenge everyone to show their patriotic colors for a prize of \$100.

Their group, Painting Oberlin Patriotic, was put together this year to try and combat the general feeling of malaise that has come from fire, drought and political commentary, as well as raise awareness for people to vote, said organizer Marcia Lohoefer.

The group plans to set up events to get the enthusiasm rolling, she said, including a "Fun Run" on Saturday, Sept. 1. The group encourages anyone with an idea for the project to propose or help plan events, and to help neighbors with decorations, she added.

Mrs. Lohoefer said she and three others, Kem Bryan, Mary Ann Erickson and Sharon Addleman, planned the project, which calls on citizens, businesses and public agencies to join them in decorating the town and bring back a sense of

excitement to the election season.

The contest runs through Nov. 6, election day. The best decorations in each of three categories — homes, businesses and government offices, — will win a \$100 cash prize.

More details will be available as the election season progresses, she said. For information, or to get in on planning events, call Mrs. Lohoefer at 475-2521, Mrs. Bryan at 339-5475, Mrs. Erickson at 475-2517 or Mrs. Addleman at 475-2123.

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Brad Marcuson is a fourth generation farmer and 1973 graduate of Decatur Community High School. He is married to Elaine and they have three children Leslie, Sarah, and Jared.

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