

Property ordinance draws fire

Editor's Note: This is the second of two main stories on the controversy over the City of Oberlin's ordinance on "blighted" property and how it's enforced. The first, along with companion articles, appeared in last week's *Oberlin Herald*.

The issue is expected to come up again at a meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway.

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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A City Council meeting Thursday is expected to draw as many as 40 people, not to hear about water rights or budget contracts, but to continue a conversation on blighted property, and how the City of Oberlin handles it.

The last meeting, on Thursday, Aug. 16, drew a larger crowd, as residents piled in to protest the city's ordinance and how the city's code enforcement officer, Jan Ackerman, handles it.

A story last week discussed the letter that the city sends out to owners of properties that are considered blighted in some way, and the constitutionality of a provision allowing the code enforcement officer to enter private property.

The Timeline

An ordinance regarding old, unused and "junked" cars on people's property appeared in October 2002, city records show. An ordinance

Council to talk fees

While many are expecting the City Council to hear from residents who plan to show up at a meeting Thursday to discuss blighted property again, the topic is not on the agenda.

The meeting, which begins at 7 p.m. at The Gateway, should focus on electrical fees and the Sappa Valley Ranch, said City Administrator Karen Larson.

"We're going to go over how much electrical fees are going to cost the city, because we've had increases," she said. "We're also going to tour the Sappa Valley Ranch after the meeting and see what kind of work needs to be done out there."

She said that as usual, city departments will report to the council, and ample time will be available for the public to talk.

establishing a program for blighted property appeared in December (See HOUSING on Page 8A)

State sending top officials for a meeting

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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The state budget director, officials of the Kansas Departments of Agriculture, Commerce and Revenue, and the Norton County economic development director will be in Oberlin next Wednesday to talk about new ways to bring people and businesses to town.

The meeting, at 6:30 p.m. at The Gateway, will focus on how citizens, civic leaders and others can work to bring people, business and industry to northwest Kansas, said Dr. Jay Anderson, who helped organize the event. Speakers will be discussing dairies looking into setting up shop in the area, a new tax incentive that the Kansas Legislature has passed to encourage business to move here and how to retain and assist busi-

nesses that are already here.

This is the first meeting at this high level for Oberlin or Decatur County, said Dr. Anderson, and a big opportunity for residents to ask questions and exchange ideas with experts from Topeka about how we can all be part of recruitment for the town.

J.J. Jones, marketing and trade coordinator for the the Department of Agriculture, will speak first, focusing on the potential for bringing a dairy here, said Dr. Anderson. He will be followed by representatives of the departments of Commerce and Revenue. The last speakers will be Scott Sproul of Norton County Economic Development, and Steve Anderson, the state budget director, an Oberlin native and Decatur Com- (See MEETING on Page 5A)



FIREMEN WORKED casually at containing a small fire that burst out in a ditch about 12 miles east and 10 miles north of Oberlin on Wednesday. The fire, apparently started by a passing road grader, burned an area about 40 feet wide and 300 feet long. It was one of three fires reported last week. — Herald staff photo by Stephanie DeCamp

Three blazes toast area fields

Three fires broke out over the past week, sweeping over at least 160 acres as the drought continues to dry up fields and farmland.

The first fire, a small one, happened last Wednesday next to a county road about 12 miles east and 10 miles north of Oberlin. It was contained and put out almost immediately.

The second, however, was a large pasture fire called in around 4 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 25. Firefighters worked for five hours to put out the flames and mop up, Fire Chief Bill Cathcart said.

The fire was 18 miles south of Oberlin, he said, on Kevin Wurm's land.

Mr. Cathcart said that the pasture was all dry grass. The Jennings and Selden fire departments also responded, he said, adding that no cattle were hurt.

Mr. Cathcart said no one knows what started the fire, but the cause



is under investigation. To add to the troubles, he said, a second fire started up about a half mile away. It burned another 60 acres.

That fire was on Mark Meitl's land about 14 miles south of Oberlin. The acreage lost was all wheat stubble, Mr. Cathcart said.

The grass fire on Wednesday was in a ditch on the property of Rick Chambers. Mr. Cathcart said that a dresser blade, used to smooth out gravel on county roads, was the likely cause.

Ross Mannie, a neighbor, called the fire in after Mr. Chambers called him. The fire spread down the road a bit, but ended up burning only about a city block's length of grass in an area about 40 feet wide and 300 feet long, said Mr. Cathcart.

No personal property was damaged.

"The pasture next to the ditch had been grazed heavily," Mr. Cathcart said, "and the grass was so stumped that the fire stopped there and didn't move. We got lucky."

Runway work near completion

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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Repaving the main runway at the Oberlin municipal airport is speeding toward completion — without a single workday missed — and a clear shot at being done on time, just two weeks from now.

The project started April 23, said airport manager Bob Fraker, adding that the runway was in pretty rough shape and needed the repairs.

The airport won't have any new capabilities, said Mr. Fraker, but will feature new, precision, medium-intensity lighting, an upgrade from the

low-intensity lighting it had before.

The work this year is Phase 1 of the city's overall airport project, repaving the main runway and taxiway and replacing the lighting. Phase 2 includes building a new, longer runway, said Sid Metcalf, chairman of the city's airport advisory committee.

Phase 2 has been a controversial subject for the city, said Mr. Metcalf, as some people want the new runway for its possibilities of bringing in freight and business, and others think it is a waste of money. As far as he knows, however, phase 2 is still on the books. On completion of

both phases, the city will have spent about \$1.2 million, he added.

This sum is higher than it might have been, because at the start of the project, the Federal Aviation Administration agreed to pay 95 percent of the cost if the city could pay the other 5 percent. The project has been in the works for over four years, Mr. Metcalf said, and during that time, Congress changed the law so the government would pay only 90 percent of the total. That meant the city would have to pull together twice as much as it had planned. By the end of the (See AIRPORT on Page 8A)

Busy youngster suffers from cancer

By **CAROLYN PLOTTS**
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If you ask 3-year old Eric Kuhlman what he wants to be when he grows up, he doesn't say a cowboy or a fireman. He says he wants to be like his daddy.

And with a miracle of modern medicine, that may just be possible.

In July, Eric, the son of Matt and Brandy Kuhlman of Norcatour, was diagnosed as having cancer, a Wilms' tumor on his right kidney. His mother said this type of cancer affects children age 3 to 5. It is usually found after the child has an accident, she said, adding that doctors told her Eric was born with the tumor, but it wasn't until after he fell at a waterslide on Friday, July 6, that he began to complain of his side hurting.

That Sunday, she said, he couldn't walk, his stomach was hard and he wouldn't allow anyone

to touch it. His parents took him to the emergency room at McCook Community Hospital.

Blood work showed his white-cell count was three times higher than normal. X-rays and a CT scan were done. A surgeon told Eric's parents that a mass had been found on his right kidney. Children's Hospital in Omaha was recommended as the best place to take him, and by 8 p.m., he and his mother were in an ambulance headed for eastern Nebraska with his father following right behind them.

The family arrived in Omaha by midnight, where a surgeon met them and double-checked the tests. He offered the worried parents some good news: the tumor had not spread. July 10, Eric's right kidney and a 1 1/2 pound tumor the size of a grapefruit, were removed. Waking after the surgery, Eric cheered his (See FUND on Page 8A)



IT WILL TAKE MORE than chemotherapy treatments to get this little buckaroo down. Three-year old Eric Kuhlman rode his "bucking horse" in the living room of his home in Norcatour.

— Herald staff photo by Carolyn Plotts

Dry weather plays havoc with corn, could harm wheat

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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Drought has crippled this year's corn crop, and if rain doesn't come soon, it may shrivel next year's wheat as well.

Last year, said Diane Barrett, county executive director for the U.S. Farm Service Agency, Decatur County produced 156 bushels of irrigated corn and 93.7 on non-irrigated corn per acre.

"I would not even want to guess what kind of a yield we may have this year," she said in an e-mail. "The drought has definitely taken its toll on the crops."

"There's fields that basically, there's hardly any corn," said Fred Callander of Hansen Mueller Grain in Oberlin, "and they won't be picked. They'll just let them stand and leave the residue."

"Some are being chopped for silage, where it is cut with a chop-

per for cows. Some are swathing and baling, and they'll feed that to cattle, too. And some have enough (grain) to be picked."

Feeding cows is what most farmers will be doing with the little bit of corn they have, Mr. Callander said. In a dry year, they can still get some nutrition out of it, though farmers must watch for possible high nitrate content.

"Corn silage quality relates directly to the amount of grain energy it can provide," said Keith VanSkiike, agriculture agent for the Twin Creeks Extension District at the Norton office, "so producers will need to test their fields to determine nutrient availability. This is also a good year to test for feed (See ADJUSTERS on Page 8A)

