

City ready to drill for new water

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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The Oberlin City Council closed out the first phase of the city's water project, replacement of old water mains in town, at its meeting Thursday, then agreed to take out a new loan for Phase 2, development of new wells outside of town.

The council closed out a \$4.7 million loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture after using only \$1.08 million. That loan was originally for a water treatment plant the city was going to build, City Adminis-

trator Karen Larson said, and what they didn't use will go back to the department.

The loan for Phase 2 is for \$7.4 million, which Mrs. Larson said is probably more than the city needs. Phase 2 started with the drilling and testing of water well sites. The council agreed to apply for the loan to begin Phase 2, but the department is still waiting on some information from the engineers before the loan is OK'd, said Mrs. Larson. She added that it should be shortly.

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Energy bill will take off

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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An energy crisis looms as environmental rules force more and more coal-fired power plants to shut down, and Oberlin city officials are struggling to decide how they should handle it.

Mayor Rob McFee attended the Kansas Municipal Energy Meeting in Topeka last month, and at the City Council's Nov. 15 meeting, gave a grim report of what he heard.

"It was interesting information," he said, "interesting and depressing. Expect all the coal power plants to shut down and be replaced with natural gas plants that haven't been built yet. They're closing the plants faster than they're building them, looks to me.

"Our generating plant is maybe going to be what keeps us from not being involved in the rolling blackouts that they're expecting to happen when they do this. What was once an option to not fix the plant seems like it's no longer an option.

"We hate to do it, because its going to cost us a lot of money, but if you want to have electricity in the peak hours of summer, that's where it's going to come from. They expect power to get more expensive and harder to find. That's what I got out of it."

The energy problem – lots of demand and little supply – has put the city at a crossroads, City Foreman Dan Castle said later. It's at a point where the city needs to make a decision on how to get power once its contract with Sunflower Energy is up (in six years). That may seem like a long time, he said, but for a municipal power system, it's not.

Because of Environmental Protection Agency regulations, said Mr. Castle, the power plant the city owns, which runs on expensive diesel fuel, is only allowed to run for 100 unit hours per generator each year. It is basically there, he said, for emergency use only, and that time can be wiped out with a storm or two.

It's going to cost a lot of money – maybe more money than the city has – to stay on the grid, bring the power plant back up to standard and run it, or incorporate alternative energy into the town, he said. There are no good, or cheap, options to look at, which is why six years isn't a lot of time. The city needs to decide which way it's going, Mr. Castle said, and then it needs to hurry up and get there.

"The city's meter charge is going to be affected by changes soon," said City Administrator Karen Larson. (See ELECTRIC on Page 5A)



Routed to the North Pole

SWARMING SANTA'S MAILBOX, in front of Stanley Hardware downtown, Jeni Henningson's kindergarten class (above and bottom left) took to the streets Tuesday to make sure their letters got to the North Pole. Alex Redinger (above) was particularly excited to mail his missive.

— Herald staff photos by Stephanie DeCamp



Stamp prices to rise in January

The price of stamps will be going up again at the end of next month as the U.S. Postal Service struggles with a financial crisis.

"They're going up the 27th of January," Oberlin Postmaster Phyllis Ziegelmeier said. "The first ounce will be 46 cents, but any additional ounces will remain at 20 cents."

The agency reported a \$15.9 billion loss for fiscal year 2012, as compared to \$5.1 billion last year. \$11.1 billion of that total loss was due to two payments to prefund retiree health benefits.

"Volume has continued to be down and we're still running on a deficit," Mrs. Ziegelmeier said, "so

hopefully we can figure out ways to increase revenue. We're always way busier during the holidays, and package service is doing pretty good."

The rate for first-class letters will go up a penny, from 45 to 46 cents, beginning in January, according to the service's website. The charge for postcards will go from 33 cents to 34 cents. Most First-Class stamps are "forever" stamps, which were created to help consumers get through price changes. Because they are "forever," they can be used through any price changes.

Prices will increase for other mailing services, the service said,

including standard mail (mostly advertising), periodicals such as newspapers and magazines, package services and extra services such as registered mail and return receipts.

Brian Sperry, a postal service spokesman in Denver, said the overall average price increase across all mailing services is capped by law at 2.1 percent, based on the rate of inflation shown by the Consumer Price Index.

The price increase is one way for the service to deal with its financial crisis, he said, and hopefully bring the agency back to its feet. He said the service adjusts prices, just like

other shipping companies, but doesn't add surcharges for fuel or residential or Saturday delivery.

A timeline of letter prices issued by the service shows the price of a stamp was 2 cents in 1885. Since 2006, the service has had a price increase every year except 2010. The last stamp increase was in January, from 44 cents to 45 cents.

"People are always (upset about the increase)," Mrs. Ziegelmeier said with a laugh, "but when you stop and think about it, it's still a really good deal to send a letter to Hawaii is 46 cents. You can't fly there for that."

Program aims to focus teens on car, life safety

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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A new seat-belt safety program is coming to Decatur Community High School, featuring prizes as big as Visa gift cards and Kindle Fire notebooks, courtesy of the Kansas Highway Patrol and Decatur County commissioners.

Trooper Tod Hileman met with the commissioners at their meeting last Tuesday (Nov. 4) to explain the project and ask for financial support. The commissioners had to check and see if they could use money from a safety grant, but promised to help out.

The program is called SAFE – Seatbelts Are For Everyone. Mr. Hileman said it was started by a Kansas Sheriff, Sandy Horton of Crawford County, who grew tired of working rollover-fatality car accidents every week.

"It's a positive enforcement pro-

gram," Mr. Hileman said. "I tried doing the ticket, and the kids don't like it, and the parents don't like it. I've been trying to figure out a way to get a better rapport with the kids and be more proactive, and this really fits."

In Oakley, he said, they started out with a 32 percent usage rate among high school students and popped it up to 80 percent by the program's end. The numbers were similar in Hill City, he said, and when they came back a year later, the rates were still up there.

"Car wrecks are the No. 1 killer of teenagers," Mr. Hileman told the commissioners. "If you look at this chart, in the last four years that project has been going, it's cut their fatality rate in half.

"The kids run the groups, make announcements and organize events for the program, and sometimes (See SEAT BELT on Page 5A)

Stanley food drive still truckin' along



CARRYING BAGS OF FOOD which members of the Sappa Valley 4-H Club raised money to buy, Kelli Bryan (left), KeLynn Jacobs (center) and her sister, KeAnn Jacobs, contributed to the Stanley Hardware food drive Monday.

— Herald staff photo by Stephanie DeCamp

Customers, 4-H members donate to food pile

When you're trying to pile up 2,000 of something, it's pretty natural to worry about reaching the goal when you start out.

Stanley Hardware's annual food drive for the Decatur County Food Pantry is about a third of the way to its goal of 2,000 items, and owner Joe Stanley says he's feeling relieved.

"It's picking up," he said. "We got a lot of stuff in today, and Friday and Saturday we picked up quite a bit. There's nothing we really need specifically, just the usual. Just keep bringing stuff."

The store is collecting anything that the pantry could need – food, personal items, coupons and cash – through New Year's Day. After the first, Mr. Stanley said, some of the kids from the high school usually help them carry it all over to the United Church of Oberlin at 109 N. Griffith Ave. The pantry in the basement there, sponsored by the Decatur County Ministerial Association, collects dona-

tions all year long.

"A lot of people will bring punch cards from the grocery store, which the pantry then uses to buy the specials every week, and a number of people also donate cash," Mr. Stanley said.

The count on Monday was 628 items, he said, and so far they've had people coming in on their own to donate, as well as the Sappa Valley 4-H Club. Mr. Stanley said that usually more groups come by to help get the drive over the hump a little closer to Christmas, particularly the grade school kids.

"I always seem to worry about (meeting the goal of 2,000) at first," he said, "but anymore, we've always made it, and I've got no reason to think we won't this year."

Last Minute Gift Guide enclosed to help the busy



Need a present but have no time to shop?

Check out *The Oberlin Herald's* Last Minute Gift Guide inside today's newspaper. It's full of gifts and special offers at area businesses.

Besides giving you gift ideas, this gift guide is full of recipes from area church and business cookbooks.

