



Mayor Rob McFee

Mayor favors pool petition

By RAMELL TAYLOR
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Although the people behind a petition to stop bonds from being issued to build a new swimming pool remain anonymous, supporters of the petition are coming forward to explain their cause.

The petitions are due to the county clerk's office by Friday, which is 30 days from the second publication of a notice about the bonds in *The Oberlin Herald*. County Clerk Colleen Geihlsler said once the petitions

are filed, the names of the people who started and signed the petition will become public.

Mayor Rob McFee said he didn't start the petition, but if he had not been mayor and the petition was not been started yet, he would have.

"I think it's grand," he said. "The Public Building Commission works around the \$2.5 million city debt (limit). The pool cost \$2.1 million, and the way to pay for the pool with a sales tax has been proven to be unsuccessful."

Mr. McFee said if the sales tax doesn't cover the payments, the city would be liable for the rest.

"With over \$6 million on the water project," he said, "and \$2 million of debt we already owe, in addition to the potential \$1 million airport project and \$2.1 million pool project, that's over \$11 million dollars in debt for the city."

Mr. McFee said Oberlin's population has been declining for 30 years, leaving fewer people to pay city debts.

"A lot of people say I'm against the pool," he said. "I'm not against the pool. I just don't see a reason to go into debt trying to buy a new one. Most of us work paycheck to paycheck, and if someone had the money to pay for it, then I would be for it."

There has been no major problems with the pool brought to his attention, Mr. McFee said. During the City Council meeting on Thursday, he asked Water Department Supervisor Willard Perrin about

the potential of the pool floor collapsing, which had been discussed during the meeting between the pool committee and the building commission two weeks ago.

Mr. Perrin said he had not dug underneath the pool, but the sides showed no signs that it could collapse.

Addressing allegations brought up by pool committee member Shayla Williby, Mayor McFee said he has not cost the city any money by (See MAYOR on Page 6A)

City cuts its budget by \$42,000

By RAMELL TAYLOR
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The Oberlin City Council heard a preliminary budget plan for 2014 at its meeting Thursday which would cut 11 percent from the city property tax levy.

City Administrator Karen Larson and her assistant, Steve Zodrow, proposed 79.77 mill as the levy for 2014. Mr. Zodrow said the tax levy for this year was 85.88 and the proposed budget cuts over \$42,000 off this year's spending.

"The majority of the budget cuts," he said, "come from the airport grant payment for \$70,000 to pave the runway and the police car that we budgeted this year for \$27,000. These expenses will not be on the next year's budget."

Salary increases, Mr. Zodrow said, will be considered in January. He said the city has budgeted 4 percent to cover raises.

Mrs. Larson said the proposed budget would have supplements for the special highway fund, the equipment fund and the Economic Development Commission fund being taken out of the general fund instead of the electrical fund so the city can begin building that fund up for future repairs.

"We lost \$539,700 from the electric reserve because of the new transformer (which burned up two years ago)," she said. "It will take a while to build that back up."

Expenses for The Gateway are projected to be \$166,200, Mrs. Larson said. She said the civic center should bring in about \$78,652 and will transfer \$75,000 from the Bremer donation fund and \$25,000 from the sewer fund to cover the cost of operations.

New expenses to consider for the budget, she said, include \$10,000 (See CITY on Page 6A)



THE JOHN DEERE 9670 STS dumped a load of seed wheat into the grain cart as it rolled through the field, continuing to cut the wheat with a Shelbourne header attachment. — Herald staff photos by Ramell Taylor

Fancy combine makes work a lot less taxing than in old days

By RAMELL TAYLOR
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Taking the opportunity to ride in a combine turned out to be not such a bad idea when the luxuries that come with the \$300,000 machine are considered.

Longtime farmer Roger May and family got their John Deere 9670 STS combine ready to harvest seed wheat from his field two miles northeast of Oberlin one evening last week.

The combine weighs about 32,000 pounds and the cab is made for two people, he said. The temperature around 6 p.m. was a humid 98 degrees, which made sitting inside the air-conditioned cab feel like a privilege more than a chore.

Other features included a radio that has CD and iPod capability, a digital monitor system that can tell you the yield and moisture level in any part of the field and a global positioning system.

Mr. May said the inside of the combine is nice and comfortable and it's not that hard to operate.

"Once you know what you're doing," he said, "it's fairly easy."

He said once he cuts seed wheat, he cleans it and sells it to farmers to plant, something his family has been doing for about 50 years.

He ran his combine with a \$5,000 Shelbourne header attachment that connects to the front of the machine.



THE FIRST DAY OF HARVEST for (from left) Ryan May, Regan Bartels and Zach May working on the May family's seed wheat field was a hot Sunday evening.

"Most farmers use a sickle attachment," Mr. May said, "which cuts low, taking in more straw ... The Shelbourne cuts the top of the wheat, leaving more straw on the field to catch more snow and less straw for the combine to process."

When the combine's bin fills up, Mr. May said, the wheat is dumped in a grain cart while the combine

continues moving so the combine doesn't have to shut down during the transfer.

The grain cart can hold 250 bushels or 15,000 pounds, he said.

Harvesting seed wheat, Mr. May said, is a lot different from traditional wheat harvest. Where most farmers cut their wheat to take to the elevator in town, he said, he and his family store and clean the

seed themselves.

Mr. May and his family worked until 10 p.m. that evening. In four hours, he and his family had cut 2,000 bushels, yielding around 50 bushels per acre.

"Even with all the combine's luxuries," he said, "you don't want to burn yourself out on the first day of harvest."

City still needs surveys for grants

By RAMELL TAYLOR
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The city needs to have income surveys from 600 families by Aug. 1 so it can receive grants that would help pay for its water and sewer projects, which means it needs another 300 surveys back in the next two weeks.

The surveys were mailed to all residents at the beginning of the month to help determine if the city qualifies for a Community Development Block Grant from the Kansas Department of Commerce, and city administrative assistant Steve Zodrow said the city is pressed for time.

"We have less than two weeks," he said, "to come up with the results to prove Oberlin has 51 percent of its residents who are low-to-moderate income. Oth-

erwise, the city would have to wait 10 years before a census report comes out with that information."

Mr. Zodrow said out of the 936 surveys sent out, he said, just 328 responses have been returned, about 33 percent. One good thing so far, he added, is that 62 percent of the responses are from low-to-moderate income households.

"The data collected from the survey," he said, "can also be used for any projects the city might have for the next 10 years. Even if the census report proves differently, the results collected in this survey trump the census."

Mr. Zodrow said the city is considering taking the surveys door to door in order to make the deadline.

Homeowners could get help with repairs

By RAMELL TAYLOR
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County Appraiser Alan Hale asked the Decatur County commissioners for their input as he presented a rough draft of a Neighborhood Revitalization Program resolution last Tuesday.

The plan is designed to give tax rebates on new construction and improvements to all eligible real estate in the county, he said.

Mr. Hale asked the commissioners if there should be a minimum that would be accepted.

Commissioner Sid Metcalf said when considering the program, the commissioners had in mind some of the older houses in Oberlin that could use work.

"You could do quite a bit of work on the exterior with \$5,000," he said, "but with a floor, you would be eliminating them."

Chairman Stan McEvoy said, however, that the county could have issues with smaller jobs. With the application fee, the rebate on

smaller projects might not be inviting, he said.

In order to qualify under his draft, Mr. Hale said, the construction or improvement would have to increase the value of the property by at least \$10,000.

In order to receive a rebate for the next year, he added, construction must be completed by Jan. 1.

Mr. Hale said if the work is not completed, the owner will not receive a tax rebate until 2015. If the owner has not completed the construction in two years' time the job would be disqualified.

The commissioners added that owners who are delinquent on property taxes are ineligible.

The unofficial date the program would take effect is Sept. 1, he added.

The commissioners asked Mr. Hale to meet with the county treasurer, clerk and economic development director to get their thoughts before their meeting Tuesday, July 30.

Slow wheat harvest draws to close

Decatur Co-op officials say wheat harvest is over in some areas of the county and those who are still harvesting are expected to be done sometime this week.

General Manager Kurt Anderson said with the recent rains, the end of harvest in areas around Oberlin, Herndon and Ludell has been slightly delayed.

"The rains we've gotten were nice," he said. "We need all the moisture we can keep in the ground for fall planting."

Mr. Anderson said the quality of wheat has been decent and the test weights are up for all of the county. He said the yield has been all over the board, which is a result from four determining factors.

"What rains you get," he said, "if (the field)

missed freeze injury, if enough fertilizer was used and the different variety of wheat effects the yield."

Mrs. Anderson said farmers around Norcatur, Jennings, Kanona and Lenora are mostly done with harvest.

If the rains continue, he said, there may be a chance to revive some of the corn fields in the county.

Last weekend, D & S Grain and Cattle Co. reported a half an inch of rain in Traer and .90 of an inch at Herndon. The Hi Plains Cooperative reported .53 of an inch in Dresden, with no rain reported in Jennings.

Hansen Mueller Grain settlement clerk Janice O'Hare said areas around Norcatur and some areas to the southeast got around

1.8 inches, but no rain was reported for last weekend.

"We need at least a couple of inches of rain," she said. "We've only been getting sprinkles."

Hansen Mueller Superintendent Brandon Kuykendall said, however, that the weather forecast for the near future is hot and dry.

"It's only going to hurt the corn," he said. "We're going to need a bit more rain, because we're expecting this year's corn harvest to be worse than last year."

