

# Tax gets lukewarm reception from city

CITY, from Page 1

Mellroy, \$11,875; Cynthia Welsh, \$13,350; Aguilar Tree Service, \$14,600; Goodys, \$15,70; and KW Construction, \$26,900.

Gerber said beautification has been one of the commissions goals, and they have received a lot of feedback about dead trees. He said money has not been specifically budgeted for tree removal, but there is enough left in the unfit structure line item to pay for it. He said Sunrise Lawn Service is licensed, bonded and insured.

Discussed the contract for cemetery maintenance. Kevin Zimmerman, who currently has the contract, is stepping back for health reasons. The commission discussed whether to hire a city employee to work on the cemetery or continue contracting with a third party.

Gerber said quality of care and cost are the primary concerns. He put together a cost estimate which showed that because the city would have to purchase equipment – possibly from Zimmerman – hiring a person would be somewhat more expensive than contracting over a period of five years.

“There are pros and cons to both,” he said. “It’s really up to the com-

mission.”

Gerber said the city has had a couple interested parties approach them about the contract.

Fairbanks said she would like to see the work contracted out. Finley said he would like to get some definite numbers if Zimmerman is willing to sell his equipment, and if those numbers don’t look good, then open it up for bids and see what’s out there. Gerber said he would put together a bid package for the commission to review.

Heard a legislative update from Gerber, who said there are plenty of federal and state issues that could affect Goodland. If a deal isn’t reached on the fiscal cliff, for instance, it could cost up to 40,000 Kansas jobs, he said. The city also watches issues having to do with electric utilities and the Environmental Protection Agency.

At the state level, he said, there are around 50 new House of Representatives members as well as 16 new senators. The League of Kansas Municipalities also has a new chief lobbyist, he said, who does not have as much experience as his predecessor. Gerber said it means that there are a lot of new people who will have to be educated on things like Home Rule and municipal utilities.

# County budgets for ambulances

BUDGET, from Page 1

county’s health insurance renewal. Krull said there would be a 3.19 percent increase in premiums this year, varying between individual and family plans.

Krull said there are many programs going into effect due to health care reform. For example, there will now be a limit of \$2,500 to flex spending accounts, where before employers set the limit. The county still has “grandfathered” status, which means it is exempt from some of the requirements, but if their plan changes too much it could lose that.

The county uses a partially self-funded plan in which it pays for all claims under \$30,000 and also purchases an aggregated stop/loss from Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Heard from Rhonda Fernandez about a wellness plan for the county. She inquired about the county offering the services at the Goodland Regional Medical Center’s health fair to its employees. She said the hospital would send people to the county to conduct the screenings. Wellness plans will save the county money, she said, because healthier employees file fewer insurance claims. There are plenty of choices, she said, including walking programs or smok-

ing cessation incentives.

Approved putting money into the Municipal Investment Pool. Treasurer April Hall said this time of year she has more money on hand than can be put into the banks. It costs money for the banks to insure as much as the county has. The investment pool is run by the state, she said, which invests the money on behalf of the counties and municipalities.

“We had an account in the past, but no one remembers using it,” she said.

Money put in is not insured by the state, she said, but by whatever company the state invests the money with.

# New workforce specialist in town part time

WORKFORCE, from Page 1

free.

“It is important to empower individuals to make their own training decisions and guide them toward their goals,” she said. “We can provide information about job vacancies, career options, student financial aid, relevant employment trends and instruction on how to conduct a job search, write a resume or interview with a prospective employer.”

“We are here to connect employers to jobseekers that are a good fit for them. Some of the services we provide are occupational skill

training, we help businesses fund their apprenticeship programs or on-the-job training, adult education, job retention programs and coaching and counseling.

“The services are designed to assist individual job seekers obtain and retain gainful positions. And, it’s important to know that although we do provide some money to help pay for education – which is available after eligibility is established – we should not be considered as a primary source of financial aid.”

Bitner added she is also filling vacancies for the popular Kansas Health Profession Opportunity Program. This is another opportu-

nity, she said for jobseekers to improve their skills. Bitner explained low-income people who are in the Temporary Assistance or Needy Families or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (Food Stamps) programs may qualify for help as they learn a health-care profession.

“(The program) helps pave the way to employment in health care,” she said. “We can provide money to pay for materials and supplies needed for training and can even assist with child care and transportation.”

Many other services are available, she said, from helping high-achieving, underprivileged high

school students take college courses, to helping English as a second language adults receive a General Educational Development degree.

To learn how Bitner’s office can help you find a job, get training or file for unemployment after being laid off; help your business find employees or help your current employees upgrade their skills; or learn how she can provide your school with youth programs for high school and college students preparing for the work force, contact her at (785) 443-4607 or bronwyn@kansasworkforceone.org.

# Black Hills Energy urges customers to keep snow and ice off meters

Severe winter weather could land heavily and with little warning now through late spring, and Black Hills Energy has an important safety message about rapidly developing dangers that can occur if snow and ice builds up on natural gas meters. The company urges customers with any gas-related emergency concerns to call the toll-free Black Hills Energy emergency number, answered all day, every day of the year, at (800) 694-8989.

Gas meters and regulators are designed

with the weather in mind, but a coating of ice or snow could cause a loss of service, an inaccurate bill, or a legitimate safety concern.

“Removing snow gently by hand or with a broom is the only way to do it,” said Vance Crocker, the general manager of Black Hills Energy’s Kansas gas utility.

Crocker warns that it’s important to remove snow before it has a chance to freeze. “If you notice ice buildup, please contact us and a Black Hills Energy technician will re-

spond free of charge,” he said. The toll-free, 24/7 Black Hills Energy emergency number is well worth repeating: (800) 694-8989.

Natural gas is injected with a rotten egg odor to help detect a leak. If you suspect an indoor gas leak:

- Get everyone out of the home or business immediately and call 911 or the Black Hills Energy emergency number from a safe distance on a cell phone or from a neighboring location.
- When leaving, don’t touch any switches

or electronics, and leave windows and doors in their current position.

• Once everyone is safely outside, don’t under any circumstances go back inside. Emergency response and Black Hills Energy personnel will let you know when it’s safe to return.

Outdoor safety measures include:

- Keep snow blowers and shovels away from gas meters and other above-ground equipment.
- Gently clear snow by hand or with a

broom.

• Use your hands or a brush to clear snow away from the outdoor vents serving high-efficiency furnaces. Furnaces will not run safely and efficiently if the vents are blocked.

• Make snow removal contractors or personnel aware of gas equipment so they don’t accidentally hit a natural gas meter or piping. Hitting the meter or piping with a shovel or other equipment could damage the meter, creating a dangerous situation.

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