

State officials hear runway plan



ON FRIDAY, Brad Weisenberger, (left) engineer with Bucher, Willis and Ratliff, discussed the plans for a longer runway with Gene Gallentine, a city airport committee member, and Gaylord Shields, before a meeting in Hays.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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Eighteen city, county and economic development officials from Decatur County went to Hays on Friday to meet with the secretary of the Kansas Department of Transportation about plans to build a 7,000-foot runway at the Oberlin airport.

Secretary Deb Miller, along with Ed Young, Maggie Thompson and Arthur Bagyns from the transportation department, got a chance to hear about plans of building a longer runway in Oberlin and why it is needed. Some, including the secretary, were hearing the plan for the first time in a formal presentation.

Also at the Hays meeting Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer; Brad Weisenberger, an engineer with Bucher, Willis and Ratliff, the city's consultants for the project; Debbie Pugh with Sen. Pat Roberts' office; Mitch Hall with Congressman Jerry Moran's office; Dave Barber with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Administration; and Dan Steffen, northwest Kansas field manager for the state Department of Commerce.

Mrs. Miller said she couldn't promise any money to build the runway until the city applies for a project, but she did say \$3 million is allocated for aviation every year. To get a chunk of that is a competitive program, she said, but after talking with the people from Decatur County and hearing the plan, she said she thought the runway is a



Secretary Deb Miller

competitive project. The best thing the city can do, she said, is apply.

The deadline for the 2009 allocation is Sept. 30, said Mrs. Miller. Even though the project might not be ready to start turning dirt, if the city is picked to receive some money, it will be kept for the city.

City Administrator Gary Shike said he already has part of the application turned in and is working on the rest of it.

The group from Oberlin included Patti Skubal, county emergency

management director; Greg Lohofener, chairman of the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., and his wife Mary Jo; Mayor Joe Stanley; Seth Lohofener, who is the son of Councilwoman Marcia Lohofener and her husband Jerry; county Commissioner Doyle Brown; Mr. Shike; Councilwoman Rhonda May; Councilman Jay Anderson and his wife Ann; Gaylord Shields; Gene Gallentine from the city's airport commission; Doc Franklin with Decatur Tomorrow; Connie Grafel, marketing director of economic development group; and Christine Niblock, with Bus and Coach International. The Jennings firm initiated the runway plan so it can bring buyers and executives into the county on business jets.

In 2000, said Mr. Weisenberger, the engineers did a study of the Oberlin airport proposing a 4,800-foot runway — the runway today is 3,792 feet long — and that proposal stood still until the activity with Bus and Coach International.

He said as they started digging deeper, they realized the bus company wasn't the only one that could use a longer runway. There is a new power company in town, he said, one of the banks uses a jet out of Goodland and the airport is one of the lifelines for the hospital. Basically these planes require more runway.

The city's airport master plan has been updated, he said, and next they (See OFFICIALS on Page 8A)

Water rules ended Council votes to end restrictions

The Oberlin City Council voted Thursday night to end outside water restrictions for the year, and just as the votes were counted, the skies opened up and it started to rain.

With the cooler temperatures on the way, said City Administrator Gary Shike, both Foreman Dan Castle and water supervisor Willard Perrin thought removing the restrictions would be OK.

Water users in the city have been on odd-even watering restrictions since July 19. People could only water lawns and gardens every other day, those with odd-numbered addresses one day and those with even-numbered addresses the next. No watering was allowed on Mondays.

Water used has been well below the trigger level the last couple of weeks, and with temperatures expected in the 50s and 60s, the city doesn't expect any more high readings, Mr. Shike said.

The council approved a \$1 an hour pay increases for Mr. Castle and Lineman Ron Beneda after completing their third year of the Kansas Municipal Utilities Lineman's Apprenticeship Program. Mr. Shike said with Mr. Castle, it would actually be a salary increase of \$2,080 a year.

The council welcomed Brad Burmaster, the new police patrolman, who started Aug. 21. Chief Wade Lockhart said Mr. Burmaster will go for several weeks academy training starting Nov. 12 unless someone drops out of an earlier class. Chief Lockhart said he thought Mr. Burmaster will be a good addition to the force.

The chief said the owners of ASC Towing and Repair called and asked if the police would stop unlocking vehicles for people since they are in the business of doing that.

In other business, the council:

- Set a public hearing for the Kansas Public Water Supply Load Fund for Thursday, Oct. 18. This hearing is so the city can borrow money from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment revolving loan fund.
- Heard a petition requesting condemnation or repair of a house at 807 W. Sappa was received.
- Heard that the 90 days given to Francis Wahrman to remove his house at 107 N. East expires on Wednesday, Sept. 19.



ON THURSDAY NIGHT at the Oberlin City Council meeting, Kevin Berens, attorney for Sunflower Wind, talked about the right of first refusal agreement proposed by the firm.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

Company hires phone service to invite residents to meeting

A handful of people showed up for the City Council meeting Thursday night to hear about a power proposal by Sunflower Wind after most

Oberlin homes got a phone call urging people to go to the meeting.

Last Tuesday, just about every home in Oberlin got a phone call telling people when the meeting was and to remind them that the council would be talking about the wind proposal.

Ten people showed up at the meeting on Thursday and stayed through the discussion about the wind proposal.

City Administrator Gary Shike said he had heard some comments about the phone calls, especially from those people who are on the national no-call list and still got a phone call. They wondered, he said, how the company got their phone numbers. The city didn't have anything to do with the phone calls, he noted.

Sunflower Wind, said Dan Rasure, partner, paid a service to call the people. He said he had no idea how the company got the phone numbers of people on the no-call list.

Basically, he said, the company

hired a phone bank company. Not everyone gets the paper or reads all of it, he said, and they wanted to make sure people are aware about what's going on.

"We presented the city with a no-risk contract," he said.

He said he has no idea how much it cost to hire the company, but he knows it was less than \$100, probably around \$25.

Anyone with caller ID noticed the call came from Calling Post Communications, which is a service out of Augusta, Ga. The number 405-308-4474 which came up will get the caller to a machine where they can either ask to have their number blocked or use a voice messaging center. People were given a St. Francis number, 332-9118, which Mr. Rasure said rolls to one of Sunflower Wind's offices. People can call that number to get questions answered, he said.

"We have given Oberlin the most watered-down contract we can give them," said Mr. Rasure. "If Oberlin doesn't want it, they don't want it."

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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The Oberlin City Council asked some questions about the Sunflower Wind power proposal at its meeting Thursday, and decided to reschedule an informational meeting on the plan for 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 20.

At first, Sunflower Wind approached the city with a firm power contract, asking the council to cancel the other power contracts and buy power from the wind farm the firm plans to build outside of town. The council questioned that proposal and a second one was offered asking for first right of refusal to sell power to the city.

Although the informational meeting had been set up for last Wednesday, not all of the people needed to answer questions were available.

At the meeting Thursday, Kevin Berens, a lawyer out of St. Francis, and Brice Barton with Sunflower Wind gave a short presentation and answered questions.

They told the council and audience that generation at the wind farm will start Jan. 1, 2009. The idea is to employ two full-time people here, with 50 to 75 construction workers at the site for about three months. The company will need two to four hotel rooms a month, the men said.

Landowners will receive a \$5,000 annual lease for the land the wind turbines are on, they said.

The wind farm will have methane and hydrogen back-up generators as a research site, said Mr. Berens. Councilwoman Rhonda May asked with what universities were involved in the research, but Mr. Barton said he wasn't able to say.

She asked if she named some if he would answer,

and he did. He said yes to Colorado School of Mines and said they are talking to Fort Hays State University. Neither Kansas State University or the University of Kansas is involved, he said.

How many towers will be put up here? asked Ms. May. Twenty, said Mr. Barton.

Throughout the meeting, questions jumped back and forth, ranging from those about a firm power contract to the first right of refusal.

The first right of refusal contract, said Mr. Berens, says that if the city has to go out on the market to purchase power that the city will buy that from Sunflower Wind at market rate.

The right of first refusal will go into effect when the city's contracts are up, he said. The company will also have an opportunity to negotiate for a long-term contract with the city.

So if the city has a contract that ends, said Councilman Rob McFee, and it opens up the bidding process, Sunflower Wind isn't a part of that? So Sunflower Wind isn't risking anything to be involved? he asked.

"Our risk starts the day construction of the wind farm starts," Mr. Barton replied.

Sunflower Wind can still be part of the bidding process, said Mr. Berens.

The city could be in a worse situation than it is today, said Ms. May. Suppose Sunflower Electric, the Hays cooperative which supplies much of the city's power, decides to bid 12 cents per kilowatt hour. Then Sunflower Wind could bid at 11 cents. That's 5 cents more than the city is paying now, he said.

The city always has the right not to accept the offer, said Mr. Berens.

That is an issue, said Ms. May. If the city irritates (See COUNCIL on Page 8A)

Treasure Hunt to roll into town

Businesses and individuals are preparing for the second annual Treasure Hunt on U.S. 36, billed as a "400-mile garage sale."

The hunt extends across U.S. 36 with sales similar to garage sales across the state, but instead of people setting up the items in their yards or garages, tables and trailers will be set up on the side of the highway across 13 counties.

Last year, dozens of people drove through Oberlin, stopping to shop at the various places on U.S. 36 looking for treasures, and then headed either east or west.

Bob Strevey, a member of the U.S. 36 Highway Association board, said he asked Othelia Vacura of Old Czech Country Antiques to head up the sales in Oberlin. She said she has been working with the chamber to get people signed up.

Although the deadline is past to get a sale on the website, she said,

up until noon on Thursday people can have their sales put on the map. Call the chamber office at 475-3441, Mrs. Vacura said; it costs \$2. She said they plan to have the maps for Oberlin available in both Norton and Atwood. The maps will also be available at Trader Horn and at the Co-op fertilizer building on the east side of town. Mrs. Vacura said people also can pick up a map at the chamber office on Main Street.

So far, there are over 16 sales set up, she said, and they expect to have more as the week goes on. This year the maps are clear and each sale will have a brightly colored number to hang near their stuff. That number will correspond to the one on the list and the map.

Next year, she said, she hopes the Chamber will decide to hold its community garage sale at the same time, since the U.S. 36 event draws people from out of town.

