

# Motel tops list of needs

## Group wants to bring in developers

Members of the Oberlin Convention and Visitors Bureau talked with the city administrator, the mayor and a councilwoman on Thursday about what needs to be done to get a motel or hotel to town.

Connie Grafel, marketing director for the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., said she had done some more calling on the project. She talked with developers in the area, who said they need everything from a feasibility study to show there will be enough business, to money for franchise fees to investors. All wanted a tax abatement, said Ms. Grafel.

She said she isn't sure if any of the developers would look at putting in a little swimming pool, but she knows there are some people who want one.

Most of the new motels aren't putting in pools, said Gary Anderson, owner of the LandMark Inn.

Maybe Dave Winfield, a Nebraska developer who talked with the Oberlin City Council months ago, could come again and look at the area, suggested Mr. Anderson. Ms. Grafel said they need to know up front what the city is willing to offer before she calls him.

The council agreed that if the city were to offer something to one developer, said Mayor Joe Stanley, that it needs to be offered to everyone. City Administrator Austin Gilley said maybe he and Ms. Grafel could come up with a list of benefits.

Ms. Grafel has already done that, said Mayor Stanley.

Each motel business wants different things, said Ms. Grafel. One wants 10 investors, and basically if there's a week that the motel doesn't make money for payroll, it comes out of the investors' pockets. She said she doesn't think she can find that many investors.

It sounds like the council is trying to be fair, which is good, said Mr. Gilley, but if it's different for each situation, it sounds like the council needs to make a decision.

The city property next to The Gateway isn't on the tax roll now, said Mr. Anderson, but when the tax abatement ends, the property will begin to pay taxes. The Gateway site has been mentioned for a motel, though it's smaller than what Mr. Anderson says he needs.

From an investment standpoint, said Mr. Gilley, it would be nice to see people come in and buy land.

He asked if the city has figures on how many people come through, how many events are held and how much visitors spend here. Would it be in the city's best interest to pay for a feasibility study so the information is available to show that it would be a viable business? he asked.

Ms. Grafel said she has figures on occupancy from the LandMark Inn and has done other research. That doesn't take away from needing to find investors or seeing what the city is willing to offer.

Bureau board member Carolyn Burtis, owner of Metcalf Real Estate, said she thinks it will be a struggle to get a bigger hotel here.

The risk the city runs into waiting, said Mr. Anderson, is the developer might lose interest with Oberlin or move on to another project.

The proposal put together by Ms. Grafel included some land ideas, dirt work on site, property tax abatements, help financing and other things, said Mayor Stanley. It seems to be offering everything the developer wanted. This was approved by the council, he said.

No it wasn't, said Ms. Grafel. She was asked to make changes and then the city attorney needed to give his go ahead. The council hasn't actually approved it.

It sounds like the research and feasibility study has been done, said Mr. Gilley, and it needs to be pitched to the county.

Mayor Stanley suggested giving the proposal information to City Attorney Steve Hirsch and then talking about it at the council meeting that night.

## Doin' a little fishin'



**HOPING TO CATCH A PRIZE**, Mia Rogers, 3, daughter of Jason and Aliasha Rogers, had her line out at the fish pond during the Mardi Gras Festival at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church parish hall in Selden on Sunday. — Herald staff photo by Cynthia Haynes

# City to ask for motel proposals

By CYNTHIA HAYNES  
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The Oberlin City Council decided Thursday to ask for proposals from builders interested in putting a motel into town.

The city has been looking at a motel for the town for several months but has balked at the cost of subsidies developers have requested.

On Thursday, Decatur County Economic Development Coordinator Connie Grafel told the council that she hoped it would make a decision.

"We have a developer, who says he's interested in our community," she told the board.

She said that the economic development saw Dave Winfield building a motel in Curtis, Neb., a town smaller than Oberlin, and asked if he would be interested in doing the same in Oberlin.

He says he'll help us to market our community, she told the council. No other chain has said that. She added that Gary Anderson, who owns the LandMark Inn, a bed and breakfast in downtown Oberlin, is supportive of getting another motel in town.

Her argument was seconded by councilwoman Marcia Lohoefer.

# Weather system is put on order

By CYNTHIA HAYNES  
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The Oberlin City Council agreed to order an automated weather system for the airport and put it up when possible to make sure that money the state has promised to pay for the equipment doesn't go for something else.

With the state budget crunch, council members agreed that it might be a good idea to go ahead and get the weather system to make sure the state, which is paying for 90 percent of the project, wouldn't find a way to transfer the money to another area.

Phil Fraker, who helps his father, Bob Fraker, the airport manager, told the council on Thursday that both companies which have bid on the project will work with the city on getting the equipment and storing it until site preparation can be completed.

Both firms have said to not start any dirt work, he said, until the Federal Aviation Commission has OK'd the site.

The city has two bids — one from All Weather Inc., also called AWI, for \$69,048 plus \$15,000 for site preparation, and the other from Vaisala for \$88,325.

"The economic development corporation, convention and visitors bureau and citizens in town are eager for us to take some steps," she said.

Councilman Ray Ward agreed. "I think we ought to proceed with it," he said.

Councilman Rob McFee was more cautious, warning that dirt work needed to make the area on the southeast side of The Gateway usable might be expensive.

"I want to know that total cost," he said. "It's going to be way more than the \$16,000 deal."

Councilwoman Rhonda May noted that she had figured the cost to the city to be closer to \$250,000 to \$300,000. She said that she thought the project would be about \$1.2 million or \$100 per square foot for a 12,000 square foot building. That, she said, would give the developer a 25 percent discount, if her figures are right.

Mr. McFee said he doesn't see how a motel will help the average Oberlin citizen, since it will be out-of-town people who will stay in it.

"Everything we do comes directly out of the working people's pockets," he said.

Ms. Grafel pointed out that it

Mr. Fraker said that he has been checking and no city or county airports in Kansas that the AWI system.

The more expensive one, Vaisala, is in Louisburg, Colo., and All Weather is in California. Using Vaisala, he said, would allow someone in the area to do the dirt work and have a better service agreement but All Weather would be cheaper.

Councilman Rob McFee suggested that the city go with Vaisala system.

Councilman Ray Ward noted that with the city paying only about 10 percent of the bill, the \$20,000 difference really comes down to \$2,000.

Councilwoman Rhonda May agreed with the men.

"I think we should spend the money," she said.

The total cost of the package will be \$98,868, which includes full installation, concrete work and a three-year maintenance contract.

Mr. Gilley said that while the city crew might be able to do the dirt work, their equipment isn't really up to that type of load. Mr. McFee said he thought the city should let Vaisala do all the work and put the system wherever the feds say it can go.

# Old county shop suffers leaky roof

The Decatur County commissioners talked about the old county shop building, south of town, that's used for storage now and leaks.

Gaylen Huntley, noxious weed director, said he had a guy with Aqua Shield look at the leaky roof. Mr. Huntley said the man said he couldn't guarantee anything on the building, but they could try to fix it. If it leaks again though, the company would charge the county to fix it again.

Maybe the county needs to look into some options, said Commissioner Ralph Unger. Years ago there was some discussion about selling that old building and starting over, maybe that needs to be looked into again.

Some thought needs to be put into the building, said Mr. Huntley. Although a decision doesn't need to be made right away, he said, something needs to be done about patching the holes.

Mr. Unger suggested the commissioners take a look at the building, so that Commissioner Gene Gallentine can see what they are talking about.

Mr. Unger said he attended the Decatur County Hospital Board meeting recently.

At the meeting, he said, he heard that the census at Cedar Living Center is 33 and there are 38 beds available. They are anticipating some new admissions.

Towards the end of April, he said, the plan is to have a strategic planning session and commissioners will probably be invited.

Dr. Stellan Andrecka, said Mr. Unger, has fulfilled his three year contract with the hospital.

Dr. Obed Saint Louis, said Mr. Unger, wants to do an evening clinic, but there's lots of red tape to go through to have that at the speciality clinic. It seems like it will need to be done through the clinic because a satellite clinic has to be so many feet away from the main clinic. The hospital isn't far enough away.

Mr. Unger added that it seems like there are people who will take advantage of an evening clinic.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Held 15, 15 and 15 minute

## County roundup

At the meeting last Tuesday, the Decatur County commissioners:

- Were invited to attend a facility assessment at the Good Samaritan Center. Story on Page 10A.
- Looked at an operational agreement to join the Decatur and Norton County Extension Districts, but there was no decision made. Story to come.
- Talked about the old county shop building's leaky roof, but no plans were made. Story at left.

closed sessions for nonelected personnel with the county clerk and county attorney. There was no action taken.

• Asked Attorney Steve Hirsch to write a letter to the department heads about holding back on spending and basing spending on a needs versus wants basis. The letter would also include cutting back on meetings that aren't important.

• Heard the state inspection papers for the ambulance service are on there way.

• Heard there is some work being done at the office in the ambulance barn, including putting in a ceiling and sheet rock. Director Linda Manning said they would then do the mudding and painting themselves.

• Held two 15 minute closed sessions for attorney-client privilege. There was no action taken.

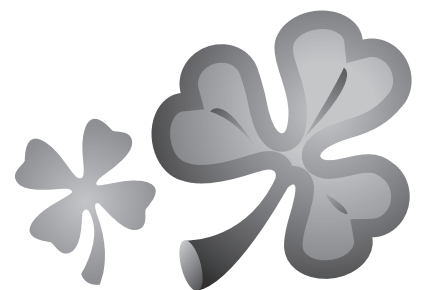
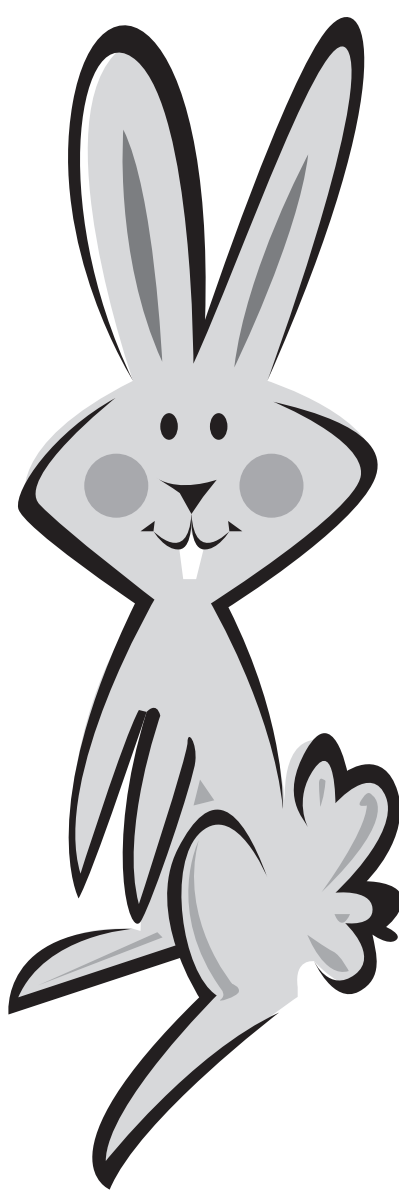
• Adopted the resolution to issue \$300,000 in general obligation bonds for the Golden Age Center. The commissioners adopted the resolution.

• Asked about the possibility of getting the electronic waste recycling trailer to the county on the same day as the Hazardous Household Waste day on Saturday, April 25.

• Heard that with the state budget crunch, the county is paying for the motel rooms for a lawyer from the attorney general's office and the state fire marshal, according to Mr. Hirsch. He added that the expense might be reimbursed at some time.

# Just for Kids COLORING PAGES

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