

Council revises letter on water to be sent out

The Oberlin City Council revised a letter written by the city administrator and then changed by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment about the city's water at a meeting Thursday, then asked the administrator to change it again.

Another water notice, said Administrator Austin Gilley, needs to be sent out by Friday, Feb. 12. At the first council meeting in January, the members asked Mr. Gilley to write a letter explaining the problems with the water in Oberlin to users who receive a required letter from the state agency.

Mr. Gilley said he wrote that letter and sent it to the state. That agency actually re-wrote the letter and sent it back, he said.

If this letter is the best the city can do, said Councilwoman Rhonda May, then the city shouldn't send one out. The letter should say there aren't any proven health concerns with the water, she said.

Under a pending consent order with the state agency, the city would agree to build a treatment plant that would lower the amount of uranium in the water used in the city.

Science, said Ms. May, doesn't support the changes in the allowed amount of this naturally occurring element. The studies, she said, just don't support the new regulations.

The allowed amount of uranium under new, stricter federal rules is 30 micrograms per liter. A test in the middle of November showed a combined uranium level at 32, according to a letter from the state.

Councilwoman Marcia Lohofener said she would add to the letter that a man with the state sat at her kitchen table and said they had no problem sending the council members to jail if they voted against the Environmental Protection Agency requirements. Mrs. Lohofener said the state person told her he was there

to help the city.

If the city is going to send a "namby-pamby: letter, said Ms. May, then the council just shouldn't send one at all.

The letter does say that Oberlin water hasn't suddenly changed and become contaminated, noted Mayor Joe Stanley.

The letter explains that the federal regulations covering the water have changed, not the actual water.

"If we are going to just roll over and play dead," said Ms. May, "we shouldn't send a letter."

Mr. Gilley said he would rewrite the letter to say what the council wants. He added that he wouldn't be comfortable signing the letter then, but the council can.

What it comes down to, said Councilman Ray Ward, is the city can put in the treatment plant or wait and put in the treatment plant after getting fined, as much as the council disagrees with it.

"The bottom line is," said Mayor Stanley, "we have to do it."

Councilman Bill Riedel said he thought they should send the letter out since it says that the water hasn't changed but the federal regulations have.

It says that the city supports the scientific evidence, said Ms. May, but there isn't any evidence. The studies don't support this.

If they sign the letter, said City Attorney Steve Hirsch, it becomes the members' words.

Mrs. Lohofener said she didn't care to sign the letter.

Ms. May suggested taking part of the middle paragraph out and inserting information from the 1998 water plan. It also could be added that the council views the expense of the plant as unnecessary.

Ms. May said she would help Mr. Gilley work on it. He said he would have it by the next meeting on Thursday, Feb. 4.



Crews clean up

IN THE ALLEY behind the Decatur County Courthouse, city crew member Willard Perrin (above) chopped up and cleaned out ice that kept water from draining out of the alley. Melvin Martin (right) loosened up sand in the back of a truck last Tuesday after a quick storm passed through the county.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis



City hears offer for code enforcement

A Hoxie woman approached the Oberlin City Council about helping enforce some of the city codes, but the council made no decision.

The council kept paperwork and information from Jan Ackerman of White Barn Business Solutions to discuss at a future meeting.

Mrs. Ackerman said she works on minimum housing and dangerous structure code violations. She said she was an investigative reporter in this area for 12 years, then became a licensed private investigator.

There are some code enforcement issues that fall between the cracks, she said. In some cities, law enforcement officers don't want to be the ones to tell people that their weeds are too high or their buildings need repair.

Mrs. Ackerman said she works with both Rexford and Norcatur as

a code enforcement officer.

She said she will take the city's codes and work with the city attorney to develop complaint forms. Mrs. Ackerman said she also works with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

If employed by the city, she said she would be the one to send out the letters to people. That means, if a neighbor or someone goes to the city office to file a complaint about

someone's weeds being too high, she said, she would take that and send a letter, basically being the go between.

Mrs. Ackerman said she charges \$40 an hour plus 50 cents a mile. She said she bills for actual time spent, including drive time. She added that she doesn't charge towns for the complaint forms that she generates from their codes and ordinances.

It's a lot better than doing nothing, said Ms. May. Now, said Administrator Austin Gilley, he takes com-

plaints, but the city doesn't have any kind of form to use.

Something needs to be done, said Mayor Joe Stanley. There are a lot of junk vehicles and shacks in town.

Mrs. Ackerman said she would be appointed by the council, but not become an employee of the city.

She gave the council her standard letter of engagement, which outlined the costs.

There was no action and no discussion. Mayor Stanley said the city would get back to her.

Local woman held on \$100,000 bond

An Oberlin woman is being held on a \$100,000 bond after being arrested Friday on five drug charges when officers found about 30 pounds in marijuana and a little over \$26,000 in cash at her home.

Lois Louise Scott, 61, was arrested Friday by the Oberlin Police after the officers executed a search warrant at 103 S. Beaver.

Chief Wade Lockhart said the warrant was executed around 8:40 a.m. Ms. Scott was booked into jail on one felony count selling an

hallucinogenic drug, marijuana; one felony count possessing a hallucinogenic drug; one count of having drug paraphernalia, in this case, a scale and cellophane wrappers; one count of using drug paraphernalia, pipes and devices used with drugs; and one count of not having a state tax stamp.

Chief Lockhart said Jeremy Scott, 28, her son, was also arrested. He was released on a \$250 bond for misdemeanor possession of drug paraphernalia.

Council to rank priorities

The Oberlin City Council received a list of 26 items Thursday to be ranked for a priority list.

At the Thursday, Jan. 7, meeting the council talked about priorities, coming up with several ideas. Administrator Austin Gilley said he added items that have been discussed at other meetings.

Mr. Gilley suggested all the council members rank the list and return it before the next meeting and he could include the compiled information in their packets.

The topics include the city web site, water treatment, the utility billing system, tree trimming, streets, the shelter house and Sappa Park, hiring recreation coordinator, records management, adding a radiator at the power plant, personnel policy, municipal court, landscaping at The Gateway, land management, a new hotel, franchise agreements, emergency management, improving the electric infrastructure, replacing curbs downtown, community relations, city codes, circuit breakers, a new fence at the cemetery, the building code, blighted property, repairs to band shell and the airport runway project.

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