



REPRESENTATIVE JOHN FABER (above) talked with banker Bob Gaskill after a “town hall” meeting Saturday at the Decatur County Courthouse. Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer (below) told the audience the Oberlin School District is safe from consolidation plans this year.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

Leaders discuss money

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
k.davis@nwkansas.com

The area’s state legislators talked about money – or the lack of money – at the state level and a newly released post audit report on school consolidation with about 40 people in Oberlin on Saturday.

Rep. John Faber and Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer were at the Decatur County courthouse over the lunch hour as part of their annual “listening tour.”

The men started their morning in Bird City, where over 350 people turned out to talk about schools, then moved on to Atwood, Oberlin and Norton.

Sen. Ostmeyer said they would try to come back in April, noting that there was a big funeral in town that day.

People are concerned about their schools, said Sen. Ostmeyer, adding that he’s sure there will be a school here.

The school budget is being propped up with money from the federal stimulus bill, he said. When that ends in 2012 and 2013, he said, the state will need to fill that void, possibly increasing taxes, or people and government are going to have to tighten their belts.

But, he said, that doesn’t mean towns like Oberlin are going to lose their schools.

Rep. Faber said this is his 14th year in office and probably the toughest. In the past, he said, he served on policy committees, but with his working relationship with the school finance formula, he was put on Appropriations this year.



The governor and Legislature are working on cuts to avoid a big state deficit this year and another in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1. The “recision” bill just passed actually resolves almost

all of the revenue shortages this year, said Rep. Faber.

He said he thinks the economy is turning around a little, but it’s still a mixed bag.

Rep. Faber talked about the

possibility of a 1-cent sales tax increase proposed by the governor. It’s a two edged sword, he said, even with language to remove the increase in two or three years.

(See OFFICIALS on Page 8A)

District safe from a merger

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
k.davis@nwkansas.com

It looks like the Oberlin School District is safe when it comes to a consolidation plan issued by the state Division of Legislative Post Audit in a report last week.

The report shows two consolidation scenarios, said Superintendent Duane Dorshorst, neither of which showed the Oberlin district merging with anyone else. Mr. Dorshorst passed out a few sheets from the post audit report at the Oberlin School Board meeting last Monday.

He said the first scenario uses the 1960s criteria, which is when the Norcatur district consolidated with Oberlin. The second scenario would merge districts with fewer than 1,600 students. Although Oberlin has fewer than 1,600 students, the study also looks at the square miles a district covers. Mr. Dorshorst said Oberlin has 828 square miles.

The report came out at 4 p.m. the day of the meeting, he said, so not

everyone had seen it yet.

He said his guess was that the Legislature might try to force the first scenario and not the second, but for Oberlin that won’t mean a whole lot.

He said he can see the Legislature using the report as a tool to start putting pressure on some schools that maybe should have consolidated in the past, especially in the northeast part of the state where there are two or three Class 1A schools in the same county.

More important to the district than the consolidation report are the cuts in the state budget which could threaten school money. As it is right now, said Mr. Dorshorst, if revenues hold steady, the district will lose \$150,286 of what was already planned for in this year’s budget.

The good news is that the board and officials saw this coming and built in enough cash for this year,

(See PUBLIC on Page 8A)

Council discusses policy for Gateway

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
k.davis@nwkansas.com

The Oberlin City Council discussed policies for The Gateway, but didn’t take a vote, during a special meeting last Monday.

City Administrator Austin Gilley said he would like to get some advice on marketing the building. He said he thought it would cost \$3,000 to \$4,000 for a marketing report.

The council decided not to accept or decline the proposed policies for the building until the study could be done. The council asked Mr. Gilley to get some bids.

The council asked questions about a few of the proposed policies.

One would prohibit smoking on Gateway property, said Mayor Joe Stanley. This isn’t really consistent with the other city property. The staff can’t smoke inside the buildings or vehicles, but can on the grounds, he said.

After discussion, the council asked Gateway Manager Kathy Brainard to add cigarette receptacles to her priority list on improvements.

Those should be put 15 feet or so away from the doors, said Councilwoman Rhonda May, or maybe the policy be “smoking in designated areas” instead.

The No. 9 policy would prohibit glitter, sprinkles, birdseed, rice and bubbles, said Mayor Stanley. Lots of churches don’t allow those items either, but do allow bubbles.

If this is for outside use, said Ms. May, lots of people use wheat here and the birds eat that.

There was no decision made. The No. 15 policy bans weapons of any kind on Gateway property, said Mayor Stanley. He asked if this means no “concealed carry” weapons or no more Pheasants Forever banquets, because they give

New policies proposed

The Oberlin City Council looked at 28 proposed policies for The Gateway during a special meeting last Monday.

This is the second time the council has looked at the list.

The proposed policies include:

- While recreational use of the facility is encouraged, priority must be given to paying customers.
 - The arena may be partitioned off to rent at a reduced price when other events are taking place.
 - No use of sporting equipment outside the arena.
 - No smoking on Gateway property.
 - Alcohol permitted in rented areas only. Alcohol is served and consumed at visitors’ and customers’ own risk.
 - Tape that is used to mark positions or play, etc., must be removed before leaving.
 - Tape cannot be used on walls.
 - Pyrotechnics, including sparklers, are prohibited.
 - Glitter, sprinkles, birdseed, rice and bubbles are prohibited.
 - Scotch tape, nails, pushpins
- (See NEW on Page 8A)

guns away?

That could just be left out completely because The Gateway is a government building so concealed guns aren’t allowed anyway, said Mayor Stanley.

(See COUNCIL on Page 8A)

Up to \$50,000 in projects OK’d

After discussing numerous proposed improvement projects at The Gateway during a special meeting last Monday, the Oberlin City Council asked the civic center’s manager to prioritize them and voted to spend up to \$50,000.

The council met last Monday just to talk about the improvement projects and proposed policies for the building. The council didn’t vote on the policies, however.

The council went over some of the projects with manager Kathy Brainard. Some, like replacing

ceiling tiles in the kitchen, which are yellowing with age and cooking fumes, were moved toward the bottom of the list.

Councilwoman Rhonda May said she had a few ideas to add, including a street light off of U.S. 83 into the curvy drive to the parking lot so people could tell where the turn for the building is. Another, she said, is

(See PROJECTS on Page 8A)



Recreation conversation next week

Everyone is invited to a Decatur Tomorrow “community conversation” planning session next Wednesday on recreation.

The conversation, said Gary Anderson, steering committee co-convenor for the group, will focus solely on recreation opportunities. The session will start at 7 p.m.

next Wednesday at the Golden Age Center in downtown Oberlin. Refreshments will be served.

The conversation will be run the same as past ones, with a brief presentation, a time for questions and then small-group discussions, he said.

Mr. Anderson said the recreation

and economic development directors from Greeley County will be at the meeting to give a presentation about what has happened with the recreation program there, which he said benefits all ages.

“One of the most remarkable aspects of Greeley County’s program,” said Mr. Anderson, “is

what they have been able to do on a limited budget.”

Quality recreation and access to it, said Mr. Anderson, has been a highly rated topic at past community conversations. This conversation will give everyone here a chance to talk about what they would like to

(See PUBLIC on Page 8A)

Former hospital employee gets probation

An Oberlin man has reached an agreement with his former employer to pay back every penny of what he embezzled, plus \$6,000 to cover investigative work by the Decatur County Hospital’s auditors.

Dave Nichols was sentenced last Tuesday to nine months in prison, which was suspended in lieu of 18 months on probation, said County Attorney Steve Hirsch. That means Mr. Nichols will be on supervised probation by Court Services for 18 months, but won’t serve time unless he

violates any conditions of the probation.

Before sentencing, Mr. Hirsch said, Mr. Nichols and hospital officials negotiated an agreement that Mr. Nichols would pay \$36,811.01 to the Great Western Insurance Co., the hospital’s insurance carrier. The hospital, said Mr. Hirsch, already has received that money from the insurance firm. Mr. Nichols also will pay the \$1,000 deductible to the hospital and an additional \$6,000 for the auditors’ work. That’s a total of \$43,811.01.

The former bookkeeper also has to write an apology letter to the hospital and do 100 hours of community service. There will also be court costs to pay, said Mr. Hirsch.

Mr. Nichols, former chief financial officer for the Decatur County Hospital and Decatur Health Systems, was charged with writing checks on the Wheat Ridge Terrace apartments account for his own benefit over the last two years.

The first check, of the 22 checks, dated back to May 2008 and the last to June 2009.

