

Old ranch might do for camp

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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The Oberlin City Council talked Thursday with a woman interested in starting a camp and retreat center at the former youth ranch at Sappa Park.

Jan Jonaitis, of Almena, talked to Mayor Joe Stanley last week about starting a camp at the former ranch. At the meeting Thursday night, Ms. Jonaitis said the area could work as a year-around camping, hunting and retreat area.

Prior to the meeting, she provided the city with a business plan for what she is calling the Sappa Lake Camp, which was included in the council members' packets.

The mission statement in the plan says, "Sappa Lake Camp will strive to provide an atmosphere and taste of country living in northwest Kansas. Sappa Lake Camp will provide an environment of fun and relaxation steeped in a rich environment of country living. Sappa Lake Camp will provide a haven for those seeking an emotional and intellectual release caused by the daily stressful environment of their lives or work."

The plan says that the camp could be used for family reunions, vacations, hunting, youth-group gatherings and church and business retreats.

Ms. Jonaitis wrote that she would use the current buildings, though each needs to be inspected.

The camp could keep a few head of cattle, hogs and maybe sheep, she said, allowing it to offer locally grown and raised protein. Activities could include horseback riding, hunting, fishing and classes.

"It is not the intent of Sappa Lake Camp to enter into the community to take," she wrote. "It is the intent of Sappa Lake Camp to reach out and give back to the community while providing a quality escape for clients."

Council roundup

At its meeting on Thursday, the Oberlin City Council:

- Decided to wait for more information before transferring more money into The Gateway account from the electric department for operating expenses. Story below left.

- Discussed buying a sign for the north side of The Gateway, but the motion died for lack of a second. The issue will come up again after the council receives a new bid. Story to come.

- Voted to terminate a contract with a Minneapolis company for solar mixers at the wastewater lagoons. Story below right.

- Talked with a woman interested in starting a camp and retreat center at the former youth ranch at Sappa Park. Story at left.

- Received a thank you for the city's recent help at Sappa Park from one of the park committee's co-conveners. Story on Page 3A.

- Approved buying close to \$9,000 in trees, shrubs and flowers to landscape the north side of The Gateway. Story below.

- Talked with a resident who complained about high taxes and lack of good water. Story to come.

"A community watches out for each other, notices a need and comes together to aid in fulfilling that need. In the last 10-plus years of living in this northwest area of Kansas, I have rediscovered the meaning of community."

Ms. Jonaitis said the council would need to decide if it wants to lease or sell the property. If leased, (See WOMAN on Page 8A)

Council holds off transferring money to Gateway account

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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The Oberlin City Council decided Thursday to wait for more information before transferring money into The Gateway account for operations.

City Administrator Austin Gilley said if things stay as they are, The Gateway could be out of money in early September. It's been costing \$30,000 a month to operate and there's a \$170,000 cash balance for the center. He said he thought the money would last six months, depending on actual expenses and revenue.

The balance, said Mr. Gilley, leaves no room for error and no operating cash to start 2011.

Mr. Gilley said he would like some direction. The council can choose to transfer money from another source, he said, or it can wait until September to do something or change the way the center is run.

In the past few months, the council approved transferring \$140,000 from the electric fund and cashed out Gateway certificates of deposit that had been put in the electric fund by mistake.

If the council decides to wait and the center runs out of money, he noted, he won't have the legal authority to pay the staff or the bills.

The council talked about how much was in the electric fund and the electric reserve fund. The electric fund has close to \$270,000 while the reserve more than \$737,000.

The council also talked about getting together a plan for beefing up an electrical system.

Mr. Gilley said there's been some talk about the city coming under pressure to run the power plant

Greenery to beautify civic center

The Oberlin City Council approved spending close to \$9,000 to landscape the north side of The Gateway with trees, shrubs and flowers.

City Administrator Austin Gilley said he received the estimate from Common Scents of McCook for \$8,919, which includes 22 trees, 24 shrubs, 67 flowers, the "spade fee" for planting, mileage, mulch and labor.

He said if the council approves the landscaping, the plants could be in within 10 to 15 days. Some of the plants proposed include cotoneaster bushes, Black Hills spruce, burr oak, pine, Thunderchild crab and others.

Mr. Gilley said the person at (See TREES on Page 8A)

more. In order to do that, he said, the city will need a new radiator to cool the engines. He said they are working with a firm called Midlands Solutions about mapping where all the poles and lines are.

Money has been taken out of the electric reserve for The Gateway in the past, said Councilwoman Rhonda May, and it seems like a good idea now, but if they don't know how much the city will need for the electric infrastructure, she hesitates to do it.

(See GATEWAY on Page 8A)



History comes to life

AT THE JUNIOR HIGH "living wax museum" Friday night, Joslyn Wade (above) portrayed Betsy Ross while Lara Zodrow (left) was Laura Elizabeth Ingalls Wilder. The students talked about their characters, and Grant Gilliam as steamboat inventor Robert Fulton (below) even did a demonstration.

— Herald staff photos by Cynthia Haynes



Council dumps solar mixer contract

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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The Oberlin City Council voted unanimously Thursday to terminate a contract with a Minneapolis company for solar mixers at the wastewater lagoons.

City Administrator Austin Gilley said he has a letter to terminate the contract with Aeromix Systems Inc., which is part of Pond Solutions LLC. The mixers were supposed to be installed by the end of February.

If the council decides to terminate the contract, said Mr. Gilley, then the city will have to work with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and probably will have to rebid the job.

The engineering firm, Miller and Associates, recommended terminating the contract, said Mr. Gilley.

It's clear that the contract has long since been over, said Mayor Joe Stanley.

Wayne Ruzicka with Aeromix went over the timeline on the contract with the council. While the mixers were supposed to be in the lagoons at the end of February, he said, the company didn't receive the final contracts until Thursday, Feb. 25.

In the middle of February, he said, Aeromix had four machines ready to ship. Mr. Ruzicka said he called engineer Chris Miler and he had some concerns about whether the machines would work in this climate.

The documents say the solar panels aren't for work in water and there is some question if the motors specified can withstand the cold and the humidity here. Mr. Ruzicka tried

to assure the council that the machines he planned to install would work here.

The competition, SolarBee, sent information that is false, said Mr.

Ruzicka. Those questions raised have been answered, he said.

It's not like Aeromix caused the delays, said Mr. Ruzicka. Those (See CITY on Page 8A)

Museum rummage sale needs your good 'stuff'

Time is running out to get those gently used items to the Last Indian Raid Museum for its ninth annual rummage sale.

People can drop off donations any time from 10 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday at the museum.

Director Sharleen Wurm said the museum will not take any large appliances or exercise equipment.

The sale will be from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and from noon to 3 p.m. on Sunday in the Bohemian Hall. There will also be a bake sale with items donated by museum members starting at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday.



Waiting her turn



AT THE KINDEGARTEN ROUNDUP on Monday, Sophie Williams drew on a chalk board at the United Methodist Church while she waited her turn. At the roundup, which takes place each year in the spring, teachers and parents see if the students are ready to attend kindergarten in the fall.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

*Gateway needs more cash

(Continued from Page 1A)

The city has an old system, said Foreman Dan Castle, with the newest lines built in the 1970s. It's going to be a real chore to fix up.

In the past, asked Councilman Bill Riedel, has the money for The Gateway come from the regular electric account or the reserve. Mr. Gilley said he thought out of the regular fund.

Ms. May asked if it was possible to figure out how much will be needed for the electric infrastructure before transferring anything to The Gateway.

Not quickly, said Mr. Gilley. Not without a capital improvement plan, added Mayor Joe Stanley. Maybe the council needs to hold a special

meeting to talk about the issue.

Councilman Rob McFee asked if the city will have a capital improvement plan before budget time. Mr. Gilley said he hopes to have some numbers by then, but they are starting from scratch.

So no decision on this tonight? asked Mayor Stanley, unless the council wants to rescind the January decision about not spending money out of the Bremer bequest.

It's difficult to take money out of the electric account to put in The Gateway, said Mr. Riedel, when there's half a million in the bank for The Gateway and it's a proven fact that the city is going to need money for electric work in the future.

It's the way it's been done in

the past, noted Councilman Ray Ward.

If the city keeps drawing money from the electric department, said Mr. McFee, then one day someone might go into their bathroom and flip on the light and not have power.

If a transformer goes out, it's \$300,000, Mr. McFee said, adding that it's his experience that when old stuff breaks down, it dominoes. When the city runs out of money in the reserve fund and there isn't any money to put in back in, he said, then the city will be at a stand still.

Ms. May said she thinks they need a capital improvement plan because it's a little less scary when you know what you need.

*Trees and shrubs bought

(Continued from Page 1A)

Common Scents told him that the plants all are drought resistant.

Mayor Joe Stanley asked what the price was for the proposed Bremer Park plan? Kathy Brainard, Gateway manager, said it was around \$10,000.

Are there other areas that need landscaping, he asked, like around the new circle drive or elsewhere. This could turn into a \$30,000 to \$40,000 project, he noted.

Easily, said Councilwoman Rhonda May, and it will be money well spent.

Another landscaping idea would be to do a retaining wall near the drive with native limestone, said Ms. May. It would add some long-lasting beauty.

She added that this would be a good use of the Bremer estate money because landscaping is part of the building that wasn't finished.

Ms. May made a motion to pro-

ceed with the landscaping on the north side, using Bremer money, with Councilman Rob McFee seconding.

Mr. McFee asked if those big trees proposed could be planted in the ditch where the water flow is. The one big tree is proposed to be on the slope, not in the ditch, said Mr. Gilley.

The council approved the landscaping with all but Councilman Bill Riedel voting in favor of it.

*City terminates mixer contract

(Continued from Page 1A)

were caused by what happened with the initial contracts and the bid award and then the reaward of the bid, he said.

Mr. Ruzicka said Aeromix is prepared to ship the mixers in seven to 14 days after the submittal is approved by Mr. Miller. All of the issues have been resolved, he said.

He said they have secured a local contractor to provide service within 24 hours and that person will have a motor on hand just in case of a failure.

Mr. Gilley asked if Aeromix is going to hold up to the \$400 a day lower on the total cost per the contract. How can the company do that when Aeromix didn't even get the contracts until three days before deadline, Mr. Ruzicka replied. He added that the equipment was ready to go in the middle of the month.

Mr. Ruzicka said while the mixers will knock down the intensity of the smell from the lagoons, it won't eliminate it.

If the equipment is so hard to get in, Councilwoman Rhonda May asked, and it's not going to deal with the smell, why buy it?

The intensity will be dramatically reduced, said Mr. Ruzicka. It should also shorten the time period that the lagoons do smell.

Some people have more sensitive noses than others, said Ms. May. Maybe the city shouldn't do the mixers.

"You have a contract with Aeromix," said Mr. Ruzicka.

Which Aeromix voided, Ms. May replied. Aeromix isn't going to honor the \$400 a day, Mayor Joe Stanley added.

Mr. Miller said information he has received says that the motor isn't warranted for 85 percent humidity or lower than 32 degrees. He added that it says the solar panels aren't for a marine environment, but Mr. Ruzicka said his experience shows him they will work.

Mr. Miller said on Tuesday, Feb. 2, the engineers issued a notice to

proceed, which can happen without the final contracts.

Ms. May asked why the city is trying to install equipment with specifications that say it won't work. The city is trying to get government money to pay for part of this, she said, and the equipment has to line up with the specifications.

Neither will the competition's equipment, said Mr. Ruzicka.

Ms. May said she could care less about the competition and the he said, he said going on here. She added that she would like to find a third firm to bid on the project. Ms. May made a motion to terminate the contract. Councilman Bill Riedel seconded it.

Mr. Ruzicka told the council to be aware before they voted that the city will receive a bill for the work his firm has done. Aeromix is entitled to compensation, he said.

"And we are entitled to mixers," Ms. May responded.

The council voted unanimously to terminate the contract.

*Woman wants to start camp at old ranch

(Continued from Page 1A)

she said, the city might lose out on property taxes. If the city wants a lease, said Ms. Jonaitis, she would like a long term.

The camp could help teach people how to relax, she said, and also about country living.

Ms. Jonaitis said she was a city girl, living in Chicago and then Colorado Springs, before moving this direction a little over 10 years

ago.

Mayor Joe Stanley said he thought the city would be more interested in leasing the property, but a long term lease is certainly workable. Ms. Jonaitis said she wants what's best for the community.

City Administrator Austin Gilley said the city's engineering firm, Miller and Associates of McCook, is working on an infrastructure analysis for the city and the build-

ings at the former ranch will be part of that.

Someone mentioned that the house which was the office at the ranch had been offered for the Pheasants Forever wildlife biologist to live. Mr. Gilley said Pheasants Forever had told him they were not interested in the house, however.

Ms. Jonaitis said she would contact economic development director Connie Grafel about the idea.

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