

## Mayor: We don't have pool money

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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 All eyes have been on Mayor Rob McFee since an emotional discourse earlier this month, when he said that he might veto a resolution to form a public building commission and sell bonds to finance a new swimming pool.

Mr. McFee sent out shock waves at the Thursday, Jan. 17, City Council meeting when he asked for two weeks to consider the motion so he could make up his mind on the veto. He's among those in suspense, waiting for a special council meeting Thursday when he promised to reveal his decision.

"I still don't know what I'm going to do," he said Friday. "It keeps me awake at night."

The meeting was called for the council members to work on re-writing the ordinance that governs blighted property, so it's likely that Mr. McFee's announcement will come early. The meeting is open to the public, and many supporters say they'll attend, but no discussion of the pool is scheduled.

Oberlin voters approved a 1.5-cent increase to the city's sales tax to pay for a new swimming pool almost 2 to 1. The council's vote to set up the public building commission was 4 to 1. So how could the mayor, many have asked, be against something so many people are for?

**The money is running out**  
 "The problem I have is the money," he said, rubbing his forehead. "Spending \$2 million on a want, and not a need. The \$2.1 million seems to me to be high to begin with. I've been to the (pool) in Atwood, and it's pretty much the same as our plan, and it didn't cost that much...."

"One of the councilmen said that the money isn't coming out of our pocket, but I don't understand that kind of thinking. Where does a tax come from, if not out of your pocket?"

"I don't understand the mentality

of it. They know that at some point in the future, we're going to spend between \$5 and \$7 million on ... wells and stuff on the water project, and there will be \$1 million coming due on the airport, if they go through with that."

The bottom line, Mr. McFee said, is that the city just doesn't have the money.

"The money is running out. The only way to make it not run out is to take more from you people who work and pay taxes."

**'It's such an emotional thing.'**  
 At the last council meeting, the mayor was surprisingly emotional — so much so, that a few people suggested he'd been drinking.

"No, I had not been drinking," Mr. McFee said, "and no, I was not drunk. Very few people see me that way, and I don't like being that way. It's just tearing me up ... We've got two polarized sides, and it's just ripping the town apart. And both sides will feel that way no matter what happens. Whichever side gets what they want, the other side is going to feel like they've been had."

"I also don't feel like I can stop the swimming pool, because that many people voted to do it. The thing that I dislike the most about the whole thing is the public building commission. It's a way to work around a debt limit that the state set, and even though the state has let the work-around become legal ... if you get a new credit card in the mail, and it's got a \$30,000 limit on it, is it all right to spend that \$30,000 right away?..."

"No one wants to know that we've broke, that everything we have we're doing with borrowed money. Just like the federal government, I guess, and that's more frightening even yet."

**Electricity, streets and water**  
 The mayor said he's been to many meetings on city issues, and all of them have pointed toward the city needing a lot of money for more

(See MAYOR on Page 8A)



## Ready, set, chili!

IT WAS A PERFECT, cold and foggy morning for chili Sunday, as area churches came together at the Bohemian Hall for a cook-off to benefit Royce and Vicky Leitner, who have some big medical bills they need help paying. From left (above), Karen Bruning, Carol Morford and Dianne and John Bremer enjoyed the samples, including the winning chili (left), from Pastor Nancy Proffit and Laurene VanOtterloo. And even the little 'uns like Rhianna Leitner (below) got into the grub.

— Herald staff photos by Stephanie DeCAMP



## County could have oil, gas

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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 There's oil deep below northwest Kansas, maybe even under Decatur County, and the race to find it is on.

A horizontal well being drilled northwest of Grainfield is the first attempt to explore the Mississippian limestone layer for oil and gas in this area, but that may be only a start.

"Kansas has got a lot of oil and gas, and we're going to talk about how it got here and what the new play is," said geologist Dan Nedland at last Tuesday's meeting of the Oberlin Rotary Club at The Gateway.

This exploration effort is called the Mississippi Lime "play," he said, and it's a result of billions of years of geological events coming together to leave pools of oil under our feet. The oil lies in what's called the Mississippian limestone formation, about 6,000 feet below the surface. This layer is about 1,000 feet below the Pennsylvanian limestone, which has been the usual oil-reservoir target in Decatur County.

Mr. Nedland said oil companies are paying about \$125 to \$300 per acre for a three-year lease in northwest Kansas, but in other areas farther south, have paid up to \$1,300 an acre.

In Decatur County, the price may be more like \$15 to \$25 per acre, he said, while in neighboring Rawlins County, the going rate is more like \$125. That's because Oberlin is on the fringe of the area in play.

Mr. Nedland pulled up a slide with a map that displayed Decatur County's known oil and gas depos-

its. Scattered about in green puddles and drips across the townships, it almost looked like a backwards question mark, with the biggest deposits in Jennings, Olive and Grant townships.

"This is happening in northwest Kansas now," he said. "This is the future. It's not a secret.... This is where the billions of barrels of oil that Jay heard of come from."

Dr. Jay Anderson, a long-time community leader, invited Mr. Nedland to speak at the Rotary meeting after a conversation with his son, state Budget Director Steve Anderson, about oil in this area. The younger Anderson said he'd heard there might be 2 billion recoverable barrels of oil in the region, his father said.

Lease money is the first thing that landowners will ask about, said Mr. Nedland, but the real meat of a deal is in the royalties.

"In this part of Kansas, it's traditionally 1/8, or 12.5 percent," he said. "So one out of every eight barrels that comes out of the ground is yours. You don't pay anything on the well or operations — it's yours free and clear. So if they found 1,000 barrels a day, that would give you 125 barrels a day, at \$100 a barrel, that's \$12,500 a day to you."

"Although 1,000 barrels a day is a great well, most good wells in this county start off at 300. But still, if you're getting 1/8 of 300 barrels, that's a lot, and near the Oklahoma border, the land owners get 1/5. So as the play gets closer to you, the royalties get bigger."

(See OIL on Page 8A)

## Advisory board rewrites Phase II

The Airport Advisory Board has rewritten the airport master plan, member Greg Lohoefer told the City Council at its Thursday, Jan. 17 meeting, and has requested to seek approval from the Federal Aviation Administration for Phase II of the project.

Mr. Lohoefer presented the massive pile of documents to the council, saying that he would return after the members had time to read through them to answer any questions.

Mr. Lohoefer said that there are three reasons to pursue Phase II: First, the longer runway is needed for medical and health care needs. The Midwest Cancer Alliance, of which the Decatur County Hospital is a member, he said, even wrote a letter of recommendation for the project.

Second, since the project started in March of 2007, he said, \$500,000 has been invested in it. And third,

Mr. Lohoefer said that the committee had made contacts with several freight businesses that said they were interested in visiting, but that the longer runway would be necessary for them to consider setting up here.

"Even though BCI is no longer a part of the community, there are many other users that will meet the criteria for phase II," he said, referring to Bus and Coach International, the company that was going to set up in Jennings but later pulled out, putting the airport project in question. "BCI made clear that the reason they chose Jennings was the location, and that hasn't changed. We are still at an important junction of highways. If one company found us, there are more."

Mr. Lohoefer said that right now, the airport holds 14 planes, and is working on a summary of flights that happen per year.

"Let's put you on the agenda for

## Special meeting Thursday

The Oberlin City Council will have a special meeting at 6 p.m. on Thursday at The Gateway to work on the ordinance governing blighted property.

Mayor Rob McFee has said he will reveal his decision on whether to veto a motion before the council to set up a public building commission to borrow money on behalf of the city for a new swimming pool. No discussion on the pool is on the agenda, however.

"We want to make clear that the only thing that will be discussed at the meeting is the health nuisance ordinance," said City Administrator Karen Larson.

The motion passed at the last council meeting on Thursday, Jan. 17, by a 4-1 vote, but the mayor asked for two weeks to think about whether to veto it. If he does, the veto could be overridden by a 4-1 vote of the council.

Council members who voted in favor of the motion are Josh Williby, Jim Miesner, Tim Bowen and Rusty Addleman. Fonda Farr voted against it.

the second meeting of February," said Mayor Rob McFee. "Thank you guys, this will be a big help." If you would like to see the new master plan, Mr. Lohoefer said, you can stop by his office at his home at 414 E. Commercial in Oberlin.

## Two more ready to run for City Council

### Who's running in your town?

- Oberlin City Council: Positions held by Fonda Farr, Josh Williby and Tim Bowen are up. Mr. Williby, Danielle Leitner, Rachel Johnson and Marilyn Horn have filed to run.
- Oberlin School District: Positions held by Abby Hissong, Douglas Brown and Dan Wasson are up. All three have filed to run, as well as David Blau.
- Dresden City Council: Donald Ritter, Jackie Douglas and Keith Muirhead's City Council positions are up; all are running.
- Twin Creek Extension District: Sharleen Wurm's and Sheryl Unger's terms here are up. Both filed to run again.
- Norcarl City Council: Seats held by Carl Lyon, Doug Dempewolf and Jeff Roe are open. No one filed to run.
- Jennings City Council: Seats of Robert Papp, Louise Cressler and Mayor Marjorie Hartzog are up. Louise Cressler is the only one who filed.

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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Just when it looked like there might not be a lot of competition for the Oberlin City Council this year, three more people slipped in right before the deadline to run for office.

Council member Josh Williby filed to seek re-election, and newcomers Danielle Leitner and Rachel Johnson, both veterans of the city's Pool Committee, filed as well. Also jumping in was Marilyn Horn, who was the Decatur County clerk for almost 30 years.

Mrs. Johnson said she comes from a small town not unlike Ober-

lin and wants to be involved for the long haul.

"My parents raised me to believe that if you see something, don't just complain — get involved and make a difference," she said. "I want Oberlin to not just survive, but thrive."

Mrs. Johnson, 39, said she moved here in 2007 with her husband J.D., and both teach social studies at Decatur Community High School. They have three children, Madeline, 12; Gabbi, 8; and Brody, 3. She said the two issues she's most

(See CANDIDATES on Page 8A)

