

Little progress is made during BESS work session

By Bill Bush
Harvey County Now Staff

HALSTEAD—For now, the Halstead City Council is moving forward in its discussions regarding regulations related to a battery energy storage system in the town’s industrial park.

Halstead’s City Council work session Monday night did contain several abnormalities related to governing body meetings in Halstead of late: no one from the gallery spoke, Mayor Dennis Travis said he would consider a moratorium, and the contention during the meeting didn’t involve the mayor or the No BESS group. It came between two of its own members.

During a 40-minute presentation to start the meeting, Travis mentioned that he came across a BESS facility being built in Lincoln, Nebraska. He called it very interesting because it uses new aqueous liquid battery technology that’s non-flammable, non-toxic and fully recyclable.

He said it’s a move in the right direction.

“It answers a lot of the environmental questions, and I think we should all have eyes on Lincoln, Nebraska, as that project progresses,” Travis said.

He said that if they wait 10 years, as the No BESS petition is requesting, then the opportunities for development in Halstead would pass the town by.

But he isn’t completely against waiting.

“Based on the project in Lincoln, Nebraska, that I’ve

got high hopes for and that technology and how that new zinc-based battery looks, I would be willing to put a two-, three-year moratorium in place so we could see that technology develop and maybe bring that to the table,” Travis said.

He also pointed out that if they don’t allow a developer to go through the process, the city runs the risk of putting themselves in a position where anyone doing a development won’t consider Halstead. He said companies have site-selectors who watch meetings and read minutes, and if they see the controversy surrounding any type of economic development, they’ll consider Halstead unfriendly and move to a different city.

“We have the director of Harvey County EDC [Beth Shelton] sitting in the audience,” Travis said. “If I’m out of line, Beth, you can tell me I’m out of line.”

“You’re correct,” Shelton said.

Council Member Shawna Will said she’s learned a lot through this process and learned a lot from what happened at the last council meeting.

“I’m human, and I learn,” Will said. “There’s no handbook they hand you when you take a city office position. I’m asking for grace in some of those aspects and learning through this process to navigate this and do what I feel like is what’s best for the community and what’s best for all citizens. I feel like that’s all I really asked when I took this position is to be trusted that that’s what I would

be doing.”

Will didn’t specify what she was referring to.

At the June 23 council meeting, Will made a motion to ban commercial and industrial BESS and allow residential systems.

She went on to say that they owe it to the community to have all the information pertinent before making a decision.

She added they needed to make a decision that was mindful of the entire community.

“There are businesses that use BESS that people maybe don’t even realize,” Will said. “We don’t want to put something in place that has a negative impact on something that already exists. That wouldn’t be responsible government.”

Council Member Charlie Robinson said he’d like to see the environmental impact studies.

“I also realize we’re not going to pay to have those done, the developer is,” Robinson said. “And we still say no.”

Council Member Denise Klassen said they can’t make a decision unless they have information and data in front of them that’s pertinent to the specific project.

“If any decision’s made before, they are emotional and based on fear,” Klassen said.

Council Member Jim VanSchaick said it was a mistake at the last meeting to make a motion without an ordinance attached.

“I don’t think it’s fair to the P&Z to go through all of that and not accept them [regulations],” VanSchaick said. “It’s our job to do this. It’s why you

asked us to sit here and take a stance.”

He said he’d be in favor of putting a moratorium on the BESS once they settle on the regulations.

He said he knows he gets limited input from constituents, but said he’s a council member for the people.

“If there’s 50 people watching this or read the paper and say they really want this, folks, that’s what I’m basing my decision on,” VanSchaick said.

Council Member George Torres said he went around town with a little notebook in hand and asked people if they wanted BESS or not. He said he got 143 no, 14 yes, and 12 I need more information.

He said he stopped asking a couple of months ago.

“I’m going to start asking again,” Torres said.

Will asked VanSchaick and Torres, “You’re gonna base all of your information off of eight or 15 percent of the community that you serve? That’s what you’re saying?”

“What do you base it off of?” VanSchaick asked Will.

“I think knowledge of the topic would be my first thing,” Will said.

“Absolutely,” VanSchaick said.

Will said that’s where she’s learning as she goes. She said she got emotional at the last meeting.

“I don’t know that I can take 10 percent of people that say, ‘I’m not for this because a car caught fire in Florida,’” Will said. “I can’t let that impact

what’s happening in Harvey County, Halstead, Kansas. That’s me, though.”

She said she would listen to constituents but that they would have the most pertinent information provided on the topic.

VanSchaick said he agreed.

That’s when things got testy between Robinson and VanSchaick.

“I think Denice and Shawna and myself, we’ve been trained to make decisions based on empirical evidence,” Robinson said.

“If you’re saying I don’t, you are absolutely and totally incorrect,” VanSchaick said. “I worked in the safety business for 40 years. Do not look at me and say I don’t look things through. I will not stand for that.”

“I’m sorry if you took it that way,” Robinson said.

“That’s the way I took it because you just mentioned three names, and you didn’t look this way,” VanSchaick said.

“We’re educators, and that’s what we do when you get a master’s degree,” Robinson said.

“Oh, so... I’m done with you,” VanSchaick said.

“Jim, I think you’re well qualified to talk on the subject,” Travis said. “I believe the decision this group arrives at is always the best decision for the city.”

Travis said he would support whatever decision the council made.

The next council meeting is next Monday, July 14, at 7 p.m.

ORGAN

From Page 1

famous.

Toews and local calliope restorer Mike Hanchett have gone to look at it. A man from Utah also visited there a couple of times. That man also saw it when it was in California. Knowing its owner died, the Utah man didn’t know what happened to it.

“He was thrilled that it wasn’t destroyed,” Anderson said, adding the man was happy someone was taking care of it.

In addition, a Belgian man from whom Anderson bought parts got ahold of Anderson and wanted to know if he could stop by. That man’s family had built fairground organs, which is another name the organs are called, since the 1880s.

That man is Jeffrey Verbeeck.

“He was very helpful,” Anderson said, adding he asked Verbeeck what something on the organ was and where it went. The man could tell him. “It was a thrill to have him here.”

There’s a group in Europe that keeps track of where the Mortier organs are throughout the world.

“The Europeans know where Walton, Kansas, is,” Anderson said.

A local mechanic asked Anderson what he was going to do with the organ, and Hanchett said, “He’s going to put Walton, Kansas, on the map.”

When the organ was built, it was larger than it is now, Anderson said. In the middle, there’s a top that goes up, and Anderson doesn’t think the



WENDY NUGENT/HARVEY COUNTY NOW

Dave Anderson of Newton wasn’t sure what he was going to do with the 22-foot organ he has in a rural Walton building when he first got it.

building is tall enough for the whole façade.

“It’s gonna be 12 feet tall, mostly in the center,” he said. “Originally, it was taller.”

He doesn’t know how tall that was.

“Originally, it was just a little wider,” he said.

He’s missing a few pieces to make it that large—just part of the façade is missing.

“I have some of it, but I don’t have all of it by any means,” he said, adding he has all the musical parts. “Everything to make it play is located in that main center chassis,” Anderson said. “If I can get the main chassis to work, that would be a big step. That’s my immediate goal. That’s where

most of the pipes are.”

Anderson mostly is restoring it himself, although his son, Jacob Anderson, is helping out.

“All my life, I’ve liked to restore things,” he said. “Dance organ is one of the biggest.”

The organ is handmade.

“There’s a guy in Wisconsin who’s been working on these things for years,” Anderson said, although he hasn’t worked on Mortiers.

The man’s advice to Anderson was to start at the bottom and do one component at a time. A previous owner already started restoration. Anderson hoped to start where the man left off.

One thing he found was the

pump leaked.

“We had to take everything out of the case to find the pump,” he said. “It was kind of demoralizing. It was kind of helpful to know how it worked taking it apart.”

His goal is to make it play, and he’s not sure he’ll ever get the rest of it finished. It does run.

With the organ, Anderson’s putting together two things he enjoys.

“I love music, and I love mechanical things,” he said about why he’s restoring the instrument. “I didn’t have a desire, but knew I wouldn’t ever get the opportunity again to own such a valuable instrument.”

PETITION

From Page 1

signatures were all sent over to County Clerk Rick Piepho for validation,” Henderson said. “K.S.A. 12-3013 does not require dates.”

He said he wants that to be a public request so that everybody knows what’s out there.

“It’s one of those things that I think that, as we’ve all tried to follow the procedures and the rules, the citizens of Halstead, 252 of us, signed and had those signatures notarized, that those were our signatures because we wanted to put this petition as set forth by 12-3013,” Henderson said.

As his comments were part of the commission meeting public forum, no discussion or action took place.

Later in the meeting, the commissioners passed a moratorium on BESS in the unincorporated areas of Harvey County

through Jan. 1, 2028, and directed the planning commission director to research and update applicable regulations. (See this week’s county commission story).

Henderson said after the meeting that the county has his support in updating the regulations.

“They’re putting a moratorium in place in the meantime in order to protect the safety of the Equus Beds and of the citizens of Harvey County,” Henderson said. “That’s got my support.”

Halstead resident and city council candidate Amy Beck said that’s (establish a moratorium) what the City of Halstead should do.

“Jantz [Brad Jantz, Harvey County legal counsel and Halstead City Attorney] is handing them all the wording to do this,” Beck said.

Henderson said if they had gotten a similar response from the city leaders six months or a year ago, then there wouldn’t be nearly the problems there

are now.

He said they need to put the brakes on, so they’re going to pursue another petition.

They may take more time in organizing this one. He said he has one more question for Piepho to avoid similar issues as this time.

“For the most part, I think what we’re probably going to have to do is resubmit a petition but do so in a way that it doesn’t get the catch-22 runaround and bullshit routine that the Harvey County Now and Hesston did when they petitioned the City of Hesston,” Henderson said.

He said they had rushed the last petition in hopes of getting the issue settled so it wouldn’t be at the forefront of things during Old Settlers Days in August. Now, that’s not an option.

“This is one of those things, I don’t think the residents of Halstead deserve the treatment that they’re getting,” Henderson said.

BESS

From Page 1

time to see where it goes, where regulations go, and how our citizens feel about it,” Rothe said.

“Obviously, over the Equus Beds, it’s still a great concern. We have to be good stewards of the Equus Beds. We don’t control the Equus Beds, but it is our job to make sure our zoning protects that water.”

County legal counsel Brad Jantz said, after spending a lot of time on BESS the last few weeks, he wanted to tweak some of the verbiage in the resolution. For instance, instead of saying battery energy storage system, to say, including but not limited to storage, production, generation, distribution and related activities.

“For purposes of making absolutely certain that it can be as much above challenge as we can make it, I would add that additional language,” Jantz said.

He said that, given Evergy is out there doing requests for proposal, inviting people to this type of activity across the state, they need to be adequately prepared.

“I don’t want to end up in a courtroom, subject to challenge, because someone attempted to pull either a CUP or a SUP, saying, ‘Your language doesn’t cover what we’re doing,’” Jantz said.

The commissioners unanimously passed a motion to direct the planning commission to review the regulations for the unincorporated areas of Harvey County pertaining to all forms of energy creation and storage, specifically including, but not limited to, the battery energy storage systems, and if necessary, make revisions to the regulations.

They also unanimously adopted a resolution enacting the moratorium until Jan. 1, 2028, on all energy creation storage systems, including BESS, battery energy storage systems, but not limited to that, subject to staff review.

In other items, commissioners:

- received a presentation of the 2026 preliminary recommended budget by Shannon Kingsley, assistant county administrator/director of finance.
- approved and signed a KDOT grant—\$671,361—awarded for replacement of all lighting and electrical of runway 8/26. The bid received and accepted from Donlinger Construction was \$448,024, with a local match of \$44,802 (county’s portion is \$22,401).
- received and allowed City of Newton to sign and execute the Donlinger Construction contract for \$4,723,240—local match, \$472,324 (county’s portion is \$236,162).
- received and allowed Newton city staff to sign and execute HNTB Task Order #3 for \$599,462.72. The local match is \$59,947 (county’s portion is \$29,973.50).