



STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC MEYER

Nearly 50 people crowd a conference room at the county's new planning and zoning office along US-56 for a public hearing on proposed changes in wind farm regulations.

Much talk, little action on wind farm rules

By **ERIC MEYER**
Staff writer

An hour and a half of discussion in front of a standing-room-only crowd ended in no action Thursday other than to check whether proposed revisions to county wind farm rules would be legal.

County commissioner Clarke Dirks drafted a complete rewrite of wind energy regulations and persuaded his fellow commissioners to send it to the county's Planning and Zoning Commission for review at a public hearing.

But before any of the nearly 50 residents who crowded into a meeting room at the county's new planning and zoning office off US-56 had a chance

to speak, zoning commissioner Brad Gorsuch summed up feelings that ultimately carried the night.

"I went through this document," he said. "Let's just take Item 2 that says all aspects shall conform to the following setbacks."

Detailing dramatically expanded requirements that would be measured not from roads but from rights-of-way, he concluded: "Basically, there's no way wind energy can exist in this county with these setbacks. If we're going to agree to Item 2, then we throw out the document and put in a statement that says we don't do anything, because this does away with wind energy."

Zoning regulations are supposed to

be "fair and reasonable," he said, "not so closed in that you have a small area in a mile section that you can put one turbine in. It just becomes prohibitive."

"I don't want to spend a whole lot of time if we're going to live with these," he said. "We just do away with the whole document, close down shop, and say we're not going to be receptive to wind energy because this is not receptive to wind energy in any way or form. It's totally slanted."

Even large landowners would have trouble qualifying because mile roads, each with its own setback, divide big tracts, Gorsuch said.

"Throw it out," he said. "It has no value to us. It's a poison pill."

Some parts supported

Zoning commissioner Michael Woelk disagreed.

"I think you've got to look at it line by line," he said. "You could take No. 2 and change some of this."

But zoning commissioner Dax Kannady argued that Dirks' proposal was "very restrictive."

"It's one person's ax to grind," he said.

Still, zoning commissioner Tracy Roberts contended "it's our job to look them over."

Nearly all commissioners seemed to agree that some aspects of Dirks' proposal might be worth looking at.

Woelk suggested that a legal review

could identify which sections might be unenforceable because they were overly restrictive and that zoning commissioners then could go through the rest line by line.

Zoning commissioner David Mueller agreed.

"Rather than create a document that's completely overbearing and unable to be used," he said, "how about just take the items about population density and use our current regulations for the rest."

Zoning commission chairman Derek Belton appeared to agree.

"That's where I struggle, too," he said. "We spent a lot, a lot of time on

PLEASE SEE **ZONING** PAGE 11

Meeting to focus on historic district

The public is being invited to attend a meeting to discuss the ongoing development of a downtown historic district in Marion.

The meeting will be at 7 p.m. Monday at 7 p.m. in the city building.

The city began working to designate a historic district in 2019.

If the state accepts that the space has historic value, Marion could receive tax credits that which to restore and rehabilitate buildings along the street.

County replaces totaled pickup

At a meeting dominated by closed-door sessions, county commissioners voted Tuesday to spend \$39,390 to buy a 2021 Dodge 2500 Tradesman to replace a Road and Bridges truck totaled after hitting a deer last fall.

The county received an insurance settlement of \$3,643.70 from the totaled truck, a 2002 Chevrolet.

Shop foreman Tom Holub proposed buying the truck from Midway Motors in Hillsboro. It has nearly 51,000 miles

on it but carries a two-year, 125,000-mile warranty with a \$100 deductible.

No other bids were presented.

Commissioners also agreed to Holub's request to sell a crane previously discussed as surplus on the online auction site Purple Wave.

Commission chairman Jonah Gehring volunteered to serve as the county's representative on a task force looking at safety along US-56.

Commissioners also hear

from rural Goessel resident Alisha Weiser, suggesting that the county pay for an advisory referendum on wind farm expansion.

After discussing but taking no action on a proposed no-bid contract for topographic work for a new county building near Peabody, they then adjourned into two executive sessions.

The first, for 15 minutes, was to discuss hiring for an unspecified position, presumably emergency medical services director.

Commissioners allowed physician Don Hodson to attend along with administrator Tina Spence.

The second, for 45 minutes, was to conduct an employment interview with a candidate to lead the county's ambulance department.

Hodson, Spencer, and county counselor Brad Jantz were included in that meeting.

No decisions were announced afterward.

Peabody needs to sort out budget, councilman says

By **FINN HARTNETT**
Staff writer

A discussion about sewer and water rates at a Peabody council meeting Tuesday turned into a more dramatic conversation about city finances and government structure.

The city unanimously voted to increase base sewer and water rates to \$35 each, plus a water surcharge of \$10 per thousand gallons. The increase will take effect July 1.

Council members Kevin Burke and Julia Ensminger both voted yes to the change, but each was hesitant to do so.

"How is this going to affect our community?" Ensminger said. "What about people now who can't pay their bills?"

Mayor Catherine Weems said residents who use a lot of water would save with the reworked rates, as they would no longer be paying sewer charges for the water they used.

"Your utilities should be generating revenue for the city, so

you don't have to levy as much tax," she said.

Burke questioned Weems on what he regarded as a lack of transparency in the city's budget.

"I don't like the idea that you, as the mayor, have control over the budget, over the bills, and that none of us do," Burke said. "I just want everyone on the council to be more involved."

He asked that line items be included in budget reports received by the council.

"I'm just as frustrated as you, Kevin," Weems replied.

She said the budget would become clearer with the hiring of a city clerk. The city has been trying to hire one for over a month.

Weems has been performing the duties of a city clerk since Rayna Crawford resigned from the role.

"I don't like even being close to any of this," she said.

Burke continued to prod the council, contending that

there was extra money in the city budget.

"I'm convinced there has to be money," he said. "If police cars are not being moved, if public lights are not being turned on... there's gotta be some extra there. If there's not, then where did it go?"

Burke said the city could be doing more to save money.

"We lost our police officers [after] we had purchased new vests," he said/ "Did we keep those vests, or did they go with the officers?"

Weems said that one was kept by the city, and one was purchased by the officer's new department for 90% of the cost.

"I don't think questions are pointed at you," Ensminger said after the situation had mellowed out somewhat. "It's just information for us."

Weems said she would ask the Loyd Group, an accounting firm, to meet with the council

PLEASE SEE **PEABODY** PAGE 11

Burns-t rubber



STAFF PHOTOS BY FINN HARTNETT

Showers made the crowd was smaller than usual, but Burns still had a strong turnout Saturday for its annual Route 77 Classic Car Show. Sixty-two vehicles rolled through town, organizer Ange Johnson said. Best of Show was awarded to Greg Willson and his 1936 Chevy Truck. Also on display (above) was the "Drag-ula" from the 1960s TV show "The Munsters."

Chingawassa DAYS



MARION'S CENTRAL PARK

Rhino's Den beer garden open at 5 p.m. Friday, 11 a.m. Saturday

FRIDAY JUNE 6

5:30 p.m.



FREE BARBECUE followed by ICE CREAM SOCIAL

6 p.m.

SAM SHILTS TRIO



7 p.m.



STEEL SKARECROW

9 p.m.



DP DALLAS PRYOR

SATURDAY JUNE 7

7:30 p.m.



Southall

9 p.m.



JOSH ABBOTT BAND

SUNDAY JUNE 8

10:30 a.m.

Community church service at Performing Arts Center

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