

What’s the Word?

SEASONS

BY DAVID WOODS

►► As fall quickly draws near, it is the time of year for a change of season in Southeast Kansas. For most, the change is very welcome. Our lives are continually experiencing change as the seasons of life ebb and flow. This never-ending process was evident at the ranch this week. Twenty years ago, it was time to remodel an old farmhouse on the property. New windows, flooring, cabinets, and paint were just some of the improvements. Last week, we removed anything of value from the old ranch house because it was time to demolish it. There is a time to build and a time to tear down. Everyone goes through the seasons of life. Some seasons are exciting and enjoyable. Others are challenging and discouraging, sometimes painful. A student of the Bible reading this article is

probably reminded of the subject of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. In this text, the author uses polar opposites to illustrate the seasons of life, such as “a time to weep and a time to laugh... a time to mourn and a time to dance.” As strange as it seems, in retrospect, events that seem to be bad sometimes turn out to be good and vice versa. The writer reveals some important truths while speaking of the seasons of life. First, none of these seasons occurs unknown to God or outside of His sovereignty. God has a purpose in our lives. Secondly, God desires for us to have faith in Him, giving thanks to Him in all circumstances and trusting in Him in seasons of difficulty. Be encouraged, no matter what season you are in today. As the song says, “have faith in God, He’s on His throne. Have faith in God, He watches o’er His own.”

Want to have a word?
David Woods is the lay pastor at First Baptist Church in Girard, KS. You can reach him at 620-238-0797.

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County adopts 2026 budget after listening to taxpayer concerns about higher property taxes

CRAWFORD COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING – AUGUST 22

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

►► Crawford County commissioners approved the 2026 county budget Friday morning following a series of public hearings that drew rare participation from local residents concerned about rising property taxes. The session began with a hearing to exceed the revenue neutral rate (RNR). Residents, including Orlando [last name unclear] of Pittsburg, told commissioners his property tax bill had risen more than 50 percent in four and a half years. “Three times, I mean, that’s a little bit excessive,” he said. Others echoed concerns,

comparing Kansas tax rates to neighboring states and questioning how valuations are set. County Counselor Jim Emerson explained that the state requires county appraisals to be within 90 to 110 percent of actual sales, which has forced valuations higher in recent years. Commissioners reminded taxpayers that they control only a portion of property taxes, with schools, cities, and other entities levying the rest. After hearing comments, commissioners approved Resolution 2025-026, authorizing Crawford County to exceed the RNR, and voted to adopt the 2026 budget. Separate hearings were then held for the

county’s three fire districts. Commissioners adopted resolutions to exceed the RNR for Fire Districts #1, #2 and #3 and approved each of their 2026 budgets. In other business, Road and Bridge Coordinator Alyssa Edwards presented the Authority to Award Contract from the Kansas Department of Transportation for a bridge near Walnut and Hepler. The low bid was submitted by B & B Construction at \$485,394, well below the \$900,000 maximum, with no county funds required. The commission approved the award. County Clerk Lisa Lusker presented a 2025 Cereal Malt Beverage license for Stephen Hipfl of Old Yale Farms,

which was approved with no objections. Commissioners also set Sept. 16 or 19 for consultant Josh Albin to return with results of the county’s comprehensive plan survey. Blair reported complaints of truck traffic on Gooding Road and discussed mowing at the landfill ahead of an inspection. Several executive sessions were held on personnel matters. The commission announced that Jasmine Kyle of SEK Humane Society will appear Sept. 2 to discuss financial assistance. With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

County approves housing study, considers development incentives

CRAWFORD COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING – AUGUST 26

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

►► The Crawford County Commission on Tuesday approved funding for a countywide housing needs analysis, the first step in considering a Reinvestment Housing Incentive District (RHID). The measure was introduced during County Counselor Jim Emerson’s new business report and followed a discussion on how the state program could be applied locally. Emerson explained that the RHID program allows counties to reimburse developers for infrastructure costs through the capture of increased property tax revenues over a period of up to 25 years. He noted that while the program has been used in Pittsburg, it has never before been attempted countywide. The commission considered a cost estimate of \$13,500 to update Pittsburg’s recent housing needs study to include

all of Crawford County. “I think it will be a great deal, because there’s a lot more people moving to the county and there’s lots of development going on,” Commissioner Carl Wood said before making the motion to proceed. Commissioner Bruce Blair seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. Discussion included questions on how boundaries would be set, how reimbursements would work, and how the program differs from the county’s former Neighborhood Revitalization program, which expired in 2023. Emerson emphasized that the housing study is required before any RHID could be established and added that the study could benefit the county even if the program is not pursued. Later in the meeting, Commissioner Carl Wood raised several items. He encouraged the board to adopt a “pay clock”

system – he didn’t specify any specific departments during the meeting – already used by the Sheriff’s Office and EMS, suggested moving forward on bids for the County Clerk’s building, and asked about progress on delinquent property tax sales. Emerson reported that the county’s new provider is preparing contracts and coordinating with the abstract company. He reminded the board that it was taking extra time since it was a new provider and new process. Wood also recommended holding work sessions to address dust control services for next year and to set clear county credit card and per diem policies for employee travel. He requested an executive session to resolve a matter with the other commissioners. Moody reported receiving a complaint about a dilapidated house on Gooding Road and asked that Zoning Administrator

May Smith follow up with the property owner. Before adjournment, Emerson noted that the Road and Bridge Department will return to regular hours after Labor Day. The board entered multiple executive sessions during the meeting, including one on legal matters related to the RHID and two later sessions concerning personnel and contracts. No binding actions were taken following these sessions. Future business includes an August 29 work session at 8:30 a.m. to sign end-of-month bills and payroll vouchers, and a September 2 appearance by Jasmine Kyle of the Southeast Kansas Humane Society regarding financial assistance. The courthouse will be closed Sept. 1 for Labor Day.

Why property tax bills rise even when mills fall

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

►► During last Friday’s Crawford County Commission budget hearing, several residents voiced frustration that their property tax bills are higher this year than in the past, even though they have made no improvements or additions to their homes. Commissioners, County Clerk Lisa Lusker, and County Counselor Jim Emerson addressed those concerns, explaining how property valuations and mill levies interact to determine a tax bill. Commissioners noted that a property owner’s tax burden depends on both the assessed value of the property and the mill levy set by the county, cities, schools, and other taxing entities. Even if a homeowner has not made changes to their house, valuations rise when neighboring sales show higher-than-expected prices. According to Emerson, the state requires each county’s valuations to fall within 90 to 110 percent of actual sales. In recent years,

Crawford County was told by state regulators that its values were too low, forcing the appraiser’s office to raise valuations in order to comply, or else the state threatened to ‘take over’ the office to make it happen. Residents argued that this means the longer they own their homes, the more they pay. Commissioners acknowledged the concern but explained that Kansas law requires annual valuations based on market data, not just on new construction. They also reminded the public that the county’s levy accounts for only about one-third of the typical tax bill, with the remainder set by school districts, cities, and other entities. One key point raised was that a resident’s bill can increase even when mill levies decrease. If a home’s valuation – which is determined by a state market analysis of property sales in our county, as well as new construction – rises by 15 percent, while the county reduces its (mill) levy by two percent, the increase in valuation outweighs the rate cut, resulting in a higher bill.

Crawford County Mill Levy Change From 2024-2026 (proposed)

- Total mill levy in Crawford County: 46.924 (2024 actual), 46.590 (2025 estimate), 47.494 (2026 proposed).
- Fire District #1: decreased to 6.059 mills in 2026.
- Fire District #2: increased to 7.135 mills in 2026.
- Fire District #3: increased to 5.836 mills in 2026.
- Fire District #4: decreased slightly to 6.148 mills in 2026.
- Fire District #3 recorded the sharpest percentage increase in mill rate, while Fire District #4 lowered its levy but increased its budget by nearly 30 percent.

Budget figures show that for the 2026 budget year, Crawford County’s overall levy is set to rise slightly above the past two years. Multiple times, the commission emphasized that valuations, not just mill levies, drive changes in tax bills. Several residents shared stories of sharp increases in their property tax burden, and commissioners explained that options for appeal exist when values are issued each spring or when taxes are paid under protest in November and December.

Editor’s Note: This explanation of valuations and mill levies is based entirely on comments and information provided during the Aug. 22 commission meeting. It should not be taken as an independent investigation by Hometown Girard. However, we hope this offers a clearer picture of a multi-layered discussion about rising property tax burdens in Crawford County.

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