

City of Mulberry submits intention to annex land for commercial solar project

CRAWFORD COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING – OCTOBER 17, 2025

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

►► The Crawford County Commission meeting on Friday, October 17, drew an unusually large crowd as residents voiced concerns about the City of Mulberry’s recent move to annex 1,700 acres of land for a proposed commercial solar energy project by Shasta Power. The City Council, including the mayor, approved the annexation resolution earlier in the week.

County Counselor Jim Emerson opened the meeting by addressing the procedural status of the annexation. Emerson confirmed that the county had received a copy of Mulberry’s annexation resolution just before the meeting, but said it was not properly certified by the city clerk as required by law. “It failed to contain a certification of the city clerk, so we’ll have to send that back for them to correct,” Emerson said. He explained that under Kansas statute K.S.A. 12-520(c), the 30-day period for county review does not begin until the certified copy is filed. “So, the 30 days do not start until we receive a certified copy,” he said.

Emerson outlined the process, noting that the county commissioners, by a two-thirds vote, must determine whether the annexation would “hinder or prevent the proper growth and development of the area” or that of any other incorporated city within the county. He said the county would likely request input from other cities before making that determination. Emerson also emphasized that while questions about the county’s solar moratorium and other legal implications had been raised, he would not issue legal opinions until the documents had been reviewed and outside counsel consulted.

The bulk of the two-hour session centered on public input. Residents from the Arma-Mulberry area spoke both for and against the annexation.

Travis Wood, who lives near the proposed site, read a prepared statement expressing opposition. He questioned the transparency and

motivation behind the annexation and said he believes it serves corporate interests over community well-being. “This proposal benefits only a select few individuals financially while the broader community bears the consequence,” Wood said. He argued that property values would decline, insurance costs could rise, and future housing development would suffer if the project moved forward. “I chose to live in a zoned area to ensure stability and responsible development,” he said, adding that he feared the annexation would set “a dangerous precedent” for other small cities seeking to bypass county regulations.

Lisa Rhodes, a resident of Arma representing Shasta Power, defended the company’s intentions and the annexation process. “Shasta has been a good neighbor,” she said, noting that the company has worked with Pittsburg State University on workforce development and polymer research. Rhodes said the company’s projected tax valuations were based on figures calculated by county officials. “We’re trying to bring some financial benefit to the county,” she said. “Mulberry will receive new revenue when those 1,642 acres are inside their city limits.” She said the landowners voluntarily petitioned for annexation and denied claims that any were coerced or paid to do so.

Rhodes also described potential partnerships with PSU’s Polymer Research Center, including planting guayule (pronounced “wy-oo-lee”), a plant used to produce natural rubber, as a buffer zone. She said the solar project would bring long-term tax base increases and stated that Shasta would fund fire training and equipment related to solar operations. “They will provide fire equipment in case there is a fire. They will provide training for those firemen to do that,” she said.

Commissioner Carl Wood pressed Rhodes for clarification on what would be developed on the annexed land. Rhodes replied that Shasta’s current plan is to install approximately 1,642

acres of solar panels and battery storage, along with about 100 acres of the guayule plant for research, but emphasized that the county’s role was to evaluate the annexation itself, not the potential development.

Several residents who spoke afterward criticized both the annexation and the proposed project. Judy Prince cited the county’s ongoing comprehensive plan process and said residents overwhelmingly supported zoning to prevent wind and solar industrial projects. She also raised concerns about toxins, fire hazards, and the devaluation of surrounding property. “Once the annexation occurs, then all the balls are over to their side of the table, and they can do what they will,” Prince said.

Jacob Cochran said taxpayers already feel overburdened and questioned why the county should lose control of rural land to small cities. “It just seems like we’re taking it in the shorts again,” Cochran said, urging commissioners to ensure transparency and public access to maps showing the annexed areas.

Becky Willard suggested the commission seek a legal opinion from Kansas Attorney General Kris Kobach on the annexation’s legality, arguing that the situation could affect residents county-wide. “This will change every single person in this county’s life,” Riley said, recommending that the attorney general be consulted rather than the local state representative due to perceived conflicts of interest. Emerson said he was open to considering the idea once a certified resolution was received.

Ann Sanders, who lives in Deer Creek Courts east of U.S. 69, said the project would be built directly behind her home and that Shasta had never completed a project. “Their primary business model is to acquire land, develop it, and then sell it,” she said, warning that the annexation could enlarge Mulberry’s boundaries fivefold without the city having the resources to manage it. She and others expressed fears about declining home values,

invasive plant species, and possible insurance impacts.

Before closing the discussion, Emerson reiterated that the county has not begun its 30-day review period and that the commissioners will provide public notice before any hearing or vote. “We are looking at the proper growth and development of the area,” he said. “When you come back to the hearing date, that’s really what we’re going to be looking for.” He added that while a public hearing is not legally required, it would likely be scheduled once the process officially begins.

After a brief recess, the commission returned to regular business. County Clerk Lisa Lusker presented a \$5,626.40 payment to the Kansas Department of Commerce for the Rural Opportunity Zone (ROZ) partnership program. Lusker explained that although Crawford County is no longer accepting new participants, payments remain due for a few remaining students who moved to the county and are still receiving tuition reimbursement. The commission approved the payment unanimously.

Counselor Emerson requested a 15-minute executive session at the end of the meeting to discuss a representation contract. He later asked the board to approve an agreement with Adams Jones Law Firm of Wichita, which is already assisting the county with its comprehensive plan, to provide additional legal representation as needed for annexation and related matters. Commissioners approved the agreement unanimously, noting it would be on an as-needed basis rather than a monthly retainer.

In old business, Emerson said he is finalizing a per-diem travel policy with the Sheriff’s Department and expects to present it at Tuesday’s meeting. Future meetings include an October 21 work session with Bukaty Companies to discuss insurance options, followed by an October 24 work session with Ryan Insurance and the Sheriff’s Department.

The meeting adjourned following the executive session.

Events through October 24th



Building Strong Readers Ages 0-5 - Join us for Building Strong Readers - our story time program - at Girard Public Library on **Wednesday, October 29th at 10:00 and or Thursday, October 30th at 10:00 am!** Have some fall fun with stories and a craft!

Building Strong Readers Ages 5-11 - Have some fun with stories, crafts, and games on **Wednesday, October 29th at 2:30 pm!**

Teen Halloween Party Grades 6th-12th - Join Kourtney on **Monday, October 27th from 5:30 pm - 6:30 pm** for the Teen Halloween Party! Have fun with a vampire book-mark craft, try your hand at stacking marshmallows, and some Halloween Bingo! There will also be a costume contest, so wear your costumes and join the fun. Stop by the library or call to get signed up.

Crock-tober at Girard Public Library - Stop by Girard Public Library for some tasty samples as we celebrate Crock-tober! We will have crock-pot recipes to sample throughout the day on **Mondays in October.**

Monthly Game Night - Join us for an evening of fun and games on **Monday, October 27th from 5:30 pm - 7:00 pm!** We will have a variety of games for all ages to enjoy! Attendees are welcome to bring games to play and enjoy with others. Separate areas will be available for different ages.

Halloween Party Sign Up - Girard Public Library will be hosting a Children’s Halloween Party for Ages 5-11 on Wednesday, October 29th from 2:30 pm - 3:30 pm and a Teen Halloween Party for Grades 6th-12th on Monday, October 27th from 5:30 pm - 6:30 pm. *Sign up for the parties will begin on Wednesday, October 1st. The Children’s Party will be limited to the first 30 children.*

Library Hours

- Monday: 9:30 am - 7:00 pm
- Tuesday - Thursday: 9:30 am - 6:00 pm
- Friday: 9:30 am - 5:00 pm
- Saturday: 9:00 am - 2:30 pm
- Sunday: Closed

Girard Public Library will be closed on Saturday, October 18th for Girard Fall Festival.

New Items at Girard Public Library

The following items are just part of the new items that have been added to our shelves recently. Stop by the library to find out what else we have added.

Adult Fiction

- *Change of Hart* by Bailey Hannah (Wells Ranch #3)
- *King of Pride* by Ana Huang (Kings of Sin #2)
- *The Intruder* by Freida McFadden
- *Dating After the End of the World* by Jeneva Rose
- *Orphan Train Disaster* by Rachel Wesson (Hearts #6)

Adult Mystery Fiction

- *Digging Up Secrets* by Elizabeth Penney (Mysteries of Cobble Hill Farm #1)
- *Hide and Seek* by Beth Adams (Mysteries of Cobble Hill Farm #2)

Adult Science Fiction

- *Alchemised* by SenLinYu

Adult Nonfiction

- *Christmas for the Heart* by Cheryl Barker
- *No More Tears: The Dark Secrets of Johnson & Johnson* by Gardiner Harris

Children's Picture Books

- *The Eye of the Fry Cook* by Erica David (Spongebob)
- *Our Thanksgiving* by Kimberly Weinberger

Adult Chapter Books

- *Mrs. Dole is Out of Control* by Dan Gutman
- *Millie by McCall Hoyle* (Best Friends Dog Tales #3)
- *Rise of the Earth Dragon* by Tracey West

Magazine

- *Consumer Reports* Nov/Dec 2025
- *People* October 27, 2025
- *Time* October 27, 2025

Movies

- *The Cold Light of Day* (Blu-Ray)
- *Karate Kid: Legends* (Blu-Ray)
- *Legion* (Blu-Ray)
- *The Passion of the Christ* (Blu-Ray)
- *Red Dawn* (Blu-Ray)
- *Superman* (Blu-Ray)

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PUBLISHER / OWNER / EDITOR
Philip Stevens - publisher@hometowngirard.com

REPORTERS / WRITERS
Josie Gronau - (General reporting)
Preston Frazier - (Sports/General reporting)
Abigail Stansbury - (Girard sports)
Laine Prince - (General reporting)
Ava Dent - (St. Paul area)
Maya Burke - (St. Paul area)
Ron Gates - (Features/Photographer)

LAYOUT & DESIGN / ADVERTISING
Corey Estep - graphics@hometowngirard.com

CONTACT US

Please direct your questions, corrections, submissions and all news items to:
Hometown Girard, PO Box 298, Girard, KS 66743
Email: publisher@hometowngirard.com
Phone: (620) 704-5882

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