

Council awards \$9.7 million waterline project

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

►► The Girard City Council on Monday, October 20, 2025, held a lengthy regular meeting focused on the city’s upcoming water infrastructure projects. Other important topics of discussion included streets, grant policies, and golf course operations.

Mayor Mickey Pyle called the meeting to order at 5 p.m. Council members Lanessa Arthur, Dennis Everett, and Darrell Westhoff were present, along with City Administrator Johanna O’Brien, Public Works Director Jackie Messer, and City Attorney Stephen Angermayer. Councilman Lucas Stansbury was not present.

The council heard an in-depth presentation from engineer Daniel Coltrane of Midwest Engineering regarding bids for the city’s long-planned water treatment plant and distribution line upgrades. Coltrane reported that two bids were received for the new treatment plant, both coming in around \$17.8 million for the base bid and rising to more than \$19 million with well improvements and additional costs. That amount, he said, was significantly higher than the city’s letter-of-conditions budget with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which is providing the loan and grant funding.

“The bids were about double what we anticipated based on

similar recent projects,” Coltrane explained. He recommended that the city defer the treatment plant portion and instead move forward with the waterline project, where bids were more favorable.

Five contractors submitted bids for the waterline work. The low bid, from Shoemaker & Sons Construction of Joplin, totaled \$9,724,524, including all six alternates. Coltrane described the bid as highly competitive and said Shoemaker has strong references and experience with similar municipal projects in the region. He noted that the contract is structured for unit-price work across six geographic sections, which will help manage any differences in underground conditions and materials encountered throughout town.

City Administrator Johanna O’Brien said she and Public Works Director Jackie Messer had previously confirmed with USDA staff that if the treatment plant came in high, leftover funds could be used to make improvements at the existing plant. Messer agreed that awarding the waterline contract now would allow the city to address its most urgent issue, replacing aging lines that contribute to daily leaks and significant water loss.

After a detailed explanation from Coltrane and various discussions relating to the projects and their funding, the council voted unanimously to award the Waterline Improvement Project to

Shoemaker & Sons for \$9,724,524, contingent upon review and approval by USDA and the city council. Coltrane said the bid is valid for 60 days, with the contractor prepared to begin work in January if federal approvals resume following the current USDA government shutdown.

Messer reported that Well No. 3 at the water plant recently failed after motor, control, and shaft problems. Crews planned to pull and repair the well beginning Tuesday, with an expected cost of \$30,000 to \$40,000. “It’s an emergency repair,” Messer said, adding that the city could not operate safely with only one functional well.

The council approved an addendum to the engineering contract for Phase II of the Earle’s Engineering sidewalk project. O’Brien said the city intends to handle tree removal outside of the federally funded portion to avoid further delays from the USDA shutdown. The phase includes sidewalk construction from Haderlein Elementary to the downtown square along the south side of Forest Avenue, improving pedestrian access and safety for students.

Council members discussed the possibility of adding future pedestrian crosswalks on the highway near Forest and Prairie streets. O’Brien said those would need to be handled as a separate project with Kansas Department of Transportation approval.

On a separate agenda item, O’Brien requested

authorization to obtain updated street condition data for all city streets. The last comprehensive survey, she said, was completed years ago and did not include coring samples. Earle’s Engineering estimated the work at about \$13,000 plus \$150 per core sample. The data would help the city prepare for future paving and overlay projects once waterline replacements are complete.

Council members agreed to table the street survey decision until the next meeting to allow time to gather an additional quote from consultant Randy Chiartano, whom O’Brien mentioned would be interested in the opportunity.

The council unanimously approved adoption of a new Grant Management Policy for the city. O’Brien said the policy provides a formal framework for how the city applies for, manages, and reports grants. “Many cities don’t realize they need one,” she said. “This gives us a clear structure that meets federal requirements.” O’Brien reported that the suggestion came from a League of Municipalities meeting she attended.

Police Chief Jesse Snider presented information on upgrading the department’s participation in the state’s 2026 STEP (Special Traffic Enforcement Program) to “Model 2.” Under this version, the city would be reimbursed for officers’ overtime hours dedicated to enforcement campaigns such as DUI or speed-

control operations, with reimbursement funds used for police equipment purchases. “It costs us nothing and helps us upgrade our equipment,” Snider said. The council expressed support and authorized the change. Practically, officers will have to record overtime hours (hours outside their regular shifts) and designate them for “grant hours.” Chief Snider asked for an additional timecard slot for this designation that will allow the officers accurately track their time and submit them to the STEP program for reimbursement and up to \$4,500 in funds towards future equipment purchases.

Mayor Pyle led a discussion on possibly changing Girard’s city council elections from ward-based to at-large positions. He said the change could allow more citizens to run for office and vote for all council seats rather than only their ward’s representative. Council members agreed to consider the proposal further and tabled the discussion for a later meeting.

The council approved the September judge’s report, showing total receipts of \$4,133 with \$3,063 remitted to the city. City Attorney Angermayer noted that “our police force is working” and encouraged the public to visit court sessions to observe operations.

Council member Darrell Westhoff summarized the Golf Committee’s recent recommendations,

including repairs to the aging irrigation pump house and continued improvements to course conditions. He said the fairways reseeded in June “have come in beautifully” and recent tournaments drew positive feedback.

Following discussion, the council entered executive sessions to discuss contractual matters and non-elected personnel related to the golf course. After returning to open session, members approved December 1, 2025, as the tentative closing date for the course this season.

Councilman Everett thanked everyone involved in organizing the Girard Fall Festival and recognized students who represented Crawford County at the Kansas Junior Livestock Show. He also commended Fire Chief Jeff Turner for leading Sunday’s Fallen Firefighters Memorial ceremony.

Arthur expressed appreciation for city staff and public safety employees. She urged patience from residents as the large-scale waterline project begins. “It’s an 18-month process,” she said, noting that road restoration will follow later phases.

Westhoff echoed their thanks and confirmed that salt and gravel supplies are stocked for winter street maintenance.

Mayor Pyle closed by again commending city staff and Turner’s leadership at the memorial service before adjourning the meeting.

Book’em Billy

SHERIFF’S OFFICE POSTS UPDATES ON FOUR SEPARATE VEHICULAR INCIDENTS IN A WEEK

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

►► Emergency personnel and law enforcement agencies in Crawford and Barton Counties responded to multiple unrelated incidents over the past several days, including a vehicle pursuit, a two-vehicle crash, the recovery of a stolen truck, and a semi rollover.

Pursuit ends safely in Barton County — Oct. 20

On Sunday night, officers with the Pittsburg Police Department initiated a pursuit involving a 2008 Ford Taurus. When the vehicle left the Pittsburg city limits, deputies with the Crawford County Sheriff’s Office joined the pursuit and ultimately took over.

The chase continued north into Barton County, Missouri, where deputies successfully conducted a Tactical Vehicle Intervention (TVI) maneuver, bringing the pursuit to a controlled end.

The driver, identified as Scott Chase of Pittsburg, was taken into custody on multiple felony warrants and new felony charges. A passenger who fled on foot, identified as Nicholis Stephenson, was located shortly afterward by a Lamar Police Department K-9 unit.

Both suspects were transported to jail after receiving medical clearance from Barton County EMS. The vehicle sustained minor damage from the TVI. No patrol units were damaged, and no injuries were reported to law enforcement personnel or others.

Chase and Stephenson are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Two-vehicle crash on K-7 Highway — Oct. 21

Emergency personnel responded Monday evening to a two-vehicle crash on K-7 Highway, approximately one mile south of 7 Mile Corner near 540th Avenue.

Officials asked motorists to avoid the area while crews worked the scene. Additional details about injuries and the cause of the crash had not been released at press time.

Stolen truck recovered, one arrested — Oct. 18

Deputies recovered a stolen vehicle late Friday after a resident reported suspicious activity at their rural home.

Earlier in the week, the owner of a 2003 Chevrolet Silverado had reported the vehicle stolen. On Oct. 18, deputies received a call from a homeowner who said a man had pulled into their driveway, asked for gas, and asked them not to call law enforcement.

Deputies arrived shortly afterward, identified the vehicle despite a different license plate, and arrested the suspect. He was identified as Michael Jackson for possessing stolen property.

Jackson is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Semi overturns on K-7 north of Girard — Oct. 16

A semi-truck overturned on K-7 Highway north of Girard on Oct. 16 after failing to follow detour signage, according to the Crawford County Sheriff’s Office.

No injuries were reported. The section of highway between 650th and 660th Avenues was restricted to local traffic while emergency crews cleared the scene.

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►► The Mulberry City Council voted unanimously on October 14 to approve a resolution to move forward with annexation proceedings for more than 1,600 acres of land west of the city for a proposed solar energy project by Shasta Power. The decision followed more than two hours of public presentations, questions, and discussion involving council members, residents, landowners, and company representatives.

The landowners have petitioned for voluntary “island” annexation of approximately 1,642 acres into the city. The property would be developed as a solar energy district with large-scale solar panel arrays and approximately \$200 million in battery storage infrastructure, according to Lisa Rhodes, representing Shasta Power.

Rhodes said the company plans to begin major construction in July 2026 with the goal of finishing by December 2027. She explained that completing the project within that timeline would allow the company to receive the full 100 percent of available federal renewable energy tax credits.

She emphasized that the \$200 million in battery infrastructure would be taxable from the first year, while the solar panels themselves would be exempt from property tax for the first 10 years under state law. After the exemption period, the full project valuation would be subject to property taxes.

During the presentation, Shasta representatives shared estimated projections for potential revenue that could result if the project is fully built and operational. They stated that the

Mulberry approves island annexation resolution

SHASTA SOLAR PROJECT ENTICES MULBERRY WITH MILLIONS

City of Mulberry could receive approximately \$2 million annually in property tax revenue in the first year, with USD 246 projected to receive around \$1.7 million, and the county also receiving its mill levy share.

Rhodes also discussed the possibility of additional sales tax revenue from power sold into the grid through Evergy and the Southwest Power Pool. She said the company expects to employ around 200 people during the 18-month construction period and about 10 people permanently once operational.

However, these figures are not supported by any formal contracts or legally binding agreements. They were presented as expectations and projections only, not guaranteed or documented financial commitments.

The council and residents discussed potential visual impacts for neighboring property owners, including questions about setbacks, fencing, and landscaping. Rhodes described plans for planting buffer vegetation, including guayule, a desert shrub used to produce natural rubber, and constructing an eight-foot privacy fence along the property lines nearest homes.

Shasta representatives said they would provide the city with design renderings developed in partnership with Pittsburg State University to give residents a clear sense of what the finished site will look like. The city is expected to adopt zoning regulations specific to the solar development, including setback requirements, fencing standards, and landscaping guidelines.

Residents raised concerns about the risk

of thermal runaway and potential fires associated with large-scale lithium-ion battery storage units. Shasta representatives said the company plans to provide both the necessary firefighting equipment and training to the city and noted they are exploring the use of sulfur-ion batteries through a partnership with EaglePicher Technologies, which are less prone to fire.

*Contextual note: these batteries are being developed and not in production.

The company also stated that bonding requirements for decommissioning will be determined by the state, but under current legislative proposals, bonds would have to be maintained and adjusted regularly throughout the life of the project.

Several residents spoke during the public comment portion. Some expressed concern about property values, the visual impact of the project, and the long-term environmental effects of industrial solar installations. One resident referenced the countywide survey conducted earlier this year as part of the comprehensive planning process, which showed mixed but significant opposition to utility-scale solar development.

Others, including Mayor Pat Walden, stressed that Mulberry has struggled for decades with limited economic opportunity and that the revenue from the solar project could help stabilize the city’s finances. “Mulberry’s not had a lot of opportunities. This is our one last maybe opportunity, and I don’t think we should turn it down. We can’t do nothing but gain from it,” Walden said.

After the discussion, the council approved the annexation resolution

by unanimous vote. The resolution initiates the formal process to annex the property into the city.

The next step will be to present the resolution and petition to the Crawford County Commission, which must determine whether the statutory criteria are met. If approved at the county level, Mulberry will publish a 60-day notice and hold a public hearing before finalizing the annexation.

Walden told attendees the city will work with both residents and Shasta representatives as the process moves forward.

Procedural setback at the county level

At the start of the subsequent Crawford County Commission meeting, County Counselor Jim Emerson announced that the commission had received Mulberry’s annexation resolution but could not accept it because it was not properly certified by the city clerk, as required by Kansas statute.

“It failed to contain a certification of the city clerk, so we’ll have to send that back for them to correct,” Emerson said, citing K.S.A. 12-520(c). He clarified that the county’s 30-day review period does not begin until the certified copy is filed.

“So, the 30 days do not start until we receive a certified copy,” he said.

This means the formal county review process for Mulberry’s annexation request has not yet officially begun and will be delayed until the city corrects and resubmits its resolution.

Mayor Walden is on the official agenda for the Oct. 22 meeting of the county commission, as is landowner Rick Elnicki, both scheduled to discuss land annexation.