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Development moratorium extended through 2026

CRAWFORD COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING – DECEMBER 12, 2025

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

►► The Crawford County Commission voted Friday to extend the county’s development moratorium through the end of 2026, citing the ongoing overhaul of the county’s comprehensive plan and growing concern over emerging energy and industrial proposals, including cryptocurrency mining, large-scale data centers, wind, and solar commercial projects.

County Counselor Jim Emerson presented Resolution 2025-034, which extends the existing moratorium through Dec. 31, 2026. Emerson explained the updated resolution expands the list of restricted uses to include cryptocurrency mining operations, while maintaining existing language covering wind energy, solar energy, battery storage facilities, and other large-scale industrial developments. Commissioners discussed whether a six-month extension would be sufficient but ultimately agreed that a one-year extension would provide stability while long-term land-use planning continues.

The discussion broadened when Commissioner Bruce Blair raised concerns about emerging nuclear-related technologies discussed during recent meetings in Wichita. Blair said information presented at the state level suggested new proposals could move quickly and outpace local regulations if counties are unprepared. Commissioners questioned whether such technologies would be addressed

under the current comprehensive plan and zoning framework.

Emerson said amendments to the comprehensive plan can be made outside the full 20-year update process, requiring public hearings before the Planning Commission and final approval by the County Commission. He confirmed that if a new technology is not covered under existing regulations, the commission retains the authority to enact a separate moratorium while policy updates are developed. Emerson told commissioners he will draft a separate resolution specifically addressing nuclear-related proposals for consideration at a future meeting.

Blair shared that he has concerns about the technology, such as the project in Parsons, KS that was recently announced. He did not share specific concerns but said he would provide more information after the new year, allowing time for further research and discussion with the other commissioners.

Emerson also reported that county planning consultant Josh Albin has expressed confidence the updated comprehensive plan could be ready for commission consideration by May 1, though commissioners acknowledged that timeline is ambitious given the scope of remaining work.

Following the moratorium vote, county resident, Jovanna Brackett-Oetinger, addressed the commission during public comment, thanking commissioners for attending recent statewide meetings and

for their attention to land-use issues affecting agricultural producers and rural property owners. Commissioners responded by noting similar concerns are being raised across Kansas as development pressure increases.

Earlier in the meeting, before regular business, the commission conducted a public hearing on vacating a portion of a county road located between Sections 14 and 23, Township 28 South, Range 25 East. Emerson explained that the request was submitted by the landowner and involves a roadway that is officially listed as open but is not passable and has caused problems when motorists mistakenly attempt to use it. With no public comment offered, commissioners closed the hearing and approved Resolution 2025-036, formally vacating the half-mile segment. Commissioners noted the area functions more as a trail than a maintained roadway and that all surrounding properties retain access.

The commission also approved routine business items, including the consent agenda by Motion 25-493, approval of the Nov. 2025 Clerk’s Report, publication of the amended budget hearing scheduled for Dec. 19, and payment of half of an invoice to Fire District No. 3 for a storm siren upgrade.

During commissioner reports, Blair and Commissioner Carl Wood summarized takeaways from recent conferences in Wichita, noting many counties face similar challenges related to energy development, infrastructure, and land use. Wood also

raised concerns about reactivating the county’s 9-1-1 advisory committee, which he said has not met in several years, and requested an updated roster so the committee can resume work.

Additional discussion addressed an ongoing nuisance issue along U.S. Highway 160 involving the accumulation of tires and debris encroaching onto county and neighboring property. Chairman Tom Moody said the zoning administrator will be asked to document the site again, and Emerson outlined enforcement options, including coordination with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

In old business, County Clerk Lisa Lusker scheduled a work session with Ryan Insurance for Tuesday, Dec. 16, at 9 a.m.

The commission entered three separate executive sessions during the meeting. The first was a 15-minute session to discuss non-elected personnel matters related to the Convention and Visitors Bureau. The second executive session addressed nuisance abatement issues involving county property. A third executive session was held under attorney-client privilege to discuss communications and purchasing matters. No action was taken following any of the closed sessions.

Before adjourning, commissioners confirmed the amended budget hearing scheduled for Friday, Dec. 19, at 10 a.m., and reviewed a district court holiday schedule distributed by Emerson for informational purposes. With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Resident asks county to lower property tax burden, nuclear energy moratorium added

CRAWFORD COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING – DECEMBER 16, 2025

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

►► Property tax impacts tied to the county’s 2025 budget took center stage during the Dec. 16 meeting at the Crawford County Courthouse, where commissioners spent an extended portion of the meeting hearing concerns from resident Roger Lomshek, discussing how changes in taxable property affected the final mill levy.

All three commissioners were present, along with County Clerk Lisa Lusker and County Counselor Jim Emerson. The meeting followed the published agenda, including required motions from the previous meeting and multiple executive sessions, with no corrections noted to the prior minutes.

Following approval and signing of motions from the Dec. 12 meeting, the board entered a brief 5-minute executive session to discuss non-elected personnel job performance related to the Convention and Visitors Bureau, as authorized under Kansas law. Two additional executive sessions were later held for attorney-client discussions regarding nuisances and county communications, conducted in closed session before returning to open meeting.

During public comment, Girard resident Roger Lomshek asked the board to revisit the 2025 property tax impact created by the county’s final mill levy and to consider reducing the levy and corresponding

department budgets before second-half taxes are due.

Lomshek presented a written analysis of 2025 tax statements, explaining that while commissioners voted earlier in the year to approve a budget amount, subsequent changes in taxable property required the mill levy to increase by slightly more than two mills to generate that revenue. As a result, he said, county property tax collections are projected to increase by approximately 10.75 percent over last year, or about \$837,000 in additional revenue.

Using examples from two Pittsburg homes, Lomshek said one property near Lincoln Park saw a valuation increase of 5.67 percent but a county tax increase of 10.3 percent, while a home in the Woodgate subdivision experienced a valuation increase of about 7 percent and a county tax increase of 11.69 percent. In both cases, he said the increase in taxes exceeded the increase in assessed value, which he attributed to the higher mill levy needed after properties moved off the tax rolls.

“We’re not just capturing valuation growth,” Lomshek said in explaining his analysis. “We’re also raising the mill to make up the gap from property that is no longer taxable.”

Lomshek said the burden of that shift falls on remaining taxpayers, many of whom are working families or retirees, and argued that residents’ ability to absorb double-digit tax increases has reached a breaking point.

“We’re not just capturing valuation growth, we’re also raising the mill to make up the gap from property that is no longer taxable.”

Roger Lomshek, Crawford County resident

He noted that while commissioners were told during the revenue neutral and budget hearings that the mill levy was expected to decrease slightly, the final levy increased after taxable valuations were finalized.

His specific request was that the county calculate what revenue would be generated at lower mill levy levels, such as returning to last year’s rate of approximately 46.6 mills or reducing it further to 45 or 44 mills, and then identify corresponding budget reductions to offset the difference.

“If we dropped the mill even a little bit,” Lomshek said, “the county would still be bringing in more money than last year, just not ten or eleven percent more.”

Based on rough calculations discussed during the meeting, Lomshek estimated that each mill represents roughly \$180,000 to \$190,000 in county revenue, meaning a two-mill reduction could require approximately \$350,000 to \$380,000 in budget cuts. Lomshek acknowledged that such reductions would be difficult but argued that modest percentage cuts across departments, delaying equipment

purchases, or conducting an efficiency audit could reduce the impact on taxpayers without eliminating services.

County Clerk Lisa Lusker and commissioners responded that the mill levy is calculated after final valuations are received and must be set at a level sufficient to fund the approved budget. They said this year’s unusually large shift in taxable property, including properties moving to tax-exempt status, significantly altered the final calculation. Lusker emphasized that the budget process already involves extensive review and that major departments such as EMS and the Sheriff’s Office have limited flexibility for reductions.

Commissioners seemingly agreed that the situation warranted further analysis, particularly to better understand how valuation changes and tax-exempt properties affect future budgets. No action was taken, but commissioners indicated that staff could provide additional calculations to clarify the financial impact of potential mill levy adjustments.

In new business, the board heard a presentation from Colin Holthaus of Kansas Workers Risk

“If we dropped the mill even a little bit the county would still be bringing in more money than last year, just not ten or eleven percent more.”

Roger Lomshek, Crawford County resident

Cooperative for Counties, commonly known as K-WORK, which submitted a sealed bid for workers’ compensation insurance coverage. Holthaus explained that K-WORK is a self-insurance pool serving 87 Kansas counties, offering risk sharing, claims management, and extensive loss-prevention training. Commissioners asked questions about training services, claims handling, and why larger metropolitan counties typically self-insure rather than participate in the pool. The sealed bid was submitted through the clerk’s office for later review, consistent with procurement procedures.

Emerson also presented a draft resolution establishing a standalone moratorium on nuclear power systems in unincorporated Crawford County. The resolution defines nuclear power systems broadly to include above-ground and below-ground reactors and would run concurrently with existing energy-related moratoriums through Dec. 31, 2026. Commissioners approved Resolution 2025-035 after brief discussion, noting that the language may need future updates as technology evolves.

Administrative matters included scheduling a

15-minute work session at 9:45 a.m. Friday, Dec. 19, to discuss ARPA funding at the request of EMS Director Randy Sandberg. Commissioners also addressed courthouse holiday hours, approving a half-day closure on Christmas Eve, full closure on Christmas Day and Friday, Dec. 26. For New Year’s, offices will close at 10 a.m. on Dec. 31 for year-end audit procedures, remain closed on Jan. 1, and reopen on Friday, Jan. 2. Essential services such as EMS, the jail, and dispatch will continue operating, with appropriate compensation for holiday staffing.

Later in the meeting, the board entered two additional executive sessions at the request of Commissioner Carl Wood to receive legal advice regarding communications with fire districts and interdepartmental billing matters, each conducted under attorney-client privilege and followed by a return to open session.

Before adjourning, commissioners announced an upcoming budget hearing at 10 a.m. Friday, Dec. 19, to consider 2025 amended budgets. With no further business, the meeting concluded.