

CHRISTMAS IN LYNDON



Submitted Christmas in Lyndon took place Saturday, Dec. 6. The day included a bazaar, pictures with Santa, and the annual parade. In addition, the Topeka High Drumline (right) participated in the parade, and then performed afterward. Parade winners were Lyndon State Bank, first place (above); First Baptist Church, second place; and Payne Financial Strategies, third place.



Osage County Commission

Carl Miller hired as county appraiser

LYNDON — The Osage County Commission moved through a full slate of administrative, technology, and financial matters during its Dec. 2 meeting, working to stabilize staffing in key county offices, tighten internal processes, and continue a multi-month effort to reconcile payroll and accounting records. Commissioners Heather Kuder, Brandon Smith and Les Holman were present, along with County Clerk Michelle Morris and County Counselor Joshua Ney.

The meeting opened with removal of a scheduled economic development item, which was pushed to a later date. Commissioners also added a personnel discussion regarding employee insurance to a later executive session.

After interviewing two candidates, commissioners voted to appoint Carl Miller as Osage County appraiser for a four-year term. Miller, a credentialed Kansas appraiser, will guide the office through upcoming valuation deadlines and new state system requirements. Commissioners noted

that his mentorship experience is expected to support internal staff development.

Treasurer Rebecca Holmberg updated the board about ongoing challenges within her office, noting recent staff turnover and the need to raise operational stability as the office continues to navigate high demand in both motor vehicle and tax divisions. Commissioners approved hiring Sarah Robertson as a motor vehicle clerk at \$16 per hour, with a start date of Jan. 28, to help address workload needs.

The treasurer's office also discussed issues related to training continuity, process consistency, and impacts of understaffing on customer service. Commissioners indicated support for further evaluation of wages and job descriptions as part of the county's broader HR review.

Clerk Morris reported continued work preparing for Osage County's transition to the State of Kansas employee health insurance plan beginning Jan. 1. Several departments are still submitting documentation,

and commissioners are weighing how the county's premium contribution structure will be set for 2026. The commission plans more discussion as final enrollment numbers come in.

The board approved a \$6,511.20 payment to Franklin County as Osage County's statutory share of the Fifth Judicial District coroner salary, a recurring cost allocated annually among member counties.

Two back-to-back executive sessions were held with Ney and a representative from Century Business Technologies to review cybersecurity concerns, administrative credentials and overall technology architecture.

Once back in open session, commissioners discussed several issues, including inconsistent use of standardized email aliases for IT support; ensuring that all administrative passwords are held by the county, not solely by vendors; clarification of overlapping responsibilities between the county's

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INSIDE



Winter Sports Preview

The Herald-Chronicle has your winter sports teams covered with photos and write-ups on the basketball and wrestling programs at Burlingame, Lyndon, Marais des Cygnes Valley, Osage City and Santa Fe Trail.



Photo submitted

Kansas Tourism Director Bridgette Jobe presents a jumbo check representing a \$5,820 Kansas Tourism Marketing Grant during a Dec. 3 presentation at the Coffey County Courthouse. The grant supports a regional "Drive 75" campaign involving Osage and Coffey counties. Pictured, from left, are Coffey County Commissioner Mark Petterson, Jobe, Coffey County Commissioner Mike Abendroth, Osage County Economic Development Director Colleen Mendoza, Coffey County Economic Development Director Jenny Tatman, and Coffey County Chamber of Commerce Director Chari Bauman.

Osage, Coffey counties awarded grant for 'Drive 75' campaign

BURLINGTON — Osage County Economic Development, in partnership with Coffey County Economic Development, the Coffey County Chamber of Commerce, and the Coffey County Tourism and Visitors Board, has been awarded a \$5,820 Kansas Tourism Marketing Grant to launch the new "Drive 75" regional marketing campaign.

The initiative will promote U.S. 75 as a premier tourism corridor through Osage and Coffey counties, applying a proven route-based tourism model to an area with significant untapped potential. The campaign aims to build a cohesive brand identity

for the corridor and position it as a convenient and authentic getaway for travelers from Topeka, northern Kansas, and the Kansas City metro.

"This project addresses a significant opportunity to capture the drive-market audience," said Coffey County Economic Development Director Jenny Tatman. "By marketing the route itself as a curated journey, we aim to increase visitor traffic, extend stays, and drive vital economic activity to the diverse small businesses, restaurants and attractions that anchor our communities."

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County employees raise concerns over delayed pay, missing retirement contributions

LYNDON — Concerns about payroll and retirement account discrepancies have prompted growing frustration among Osage County employees, according to reporting by WIBW-TV in Topeka.

WIBW's coverage highlighted employee claims that paychecks have arrived late or in incorrect amounts and that required deductions for the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System (KPERs) have not been deposited into their accounts for several

months. The station reported that a county commissioner confirmed KPERs contributions had not posted since May, despite the deductions appearing on employee pay statements.

Longtime road and bridge employee Brian Yockey was among those who spoke publicly about the issue during a recent commission meeting, noting the importance of dependable pay and the seriousness of missing retirement funds. WIBW reported that dozens of county

employees have voiced similar concerns.

According to the station, KPERs officials said employers are responsible for ensuring contributions are submitted and that penalties can apply when accounts fall behind.

Osage County Counselor Josh Ney told WIBW the county is working to improve financial practices and is committed to safeguarding public funds. County officials also indicated they are working with a Topeka-

based accounting firm to identify the source of payroll and retirement discrepancies.

In WIBW's reporting, County Clerk Michelle Morris attributed broader payroll challenges to significant staff turnover and difficulties with a third-party vendor hired to manage payroll services. She told the station that issues with the vendor dated back to the beginning of its contract and that several implementation steps remain unresolved. When asked about

the KPERs concerns, she told WIBW the questions "are being addressed."

Employees who spoke to commissioners said they remain eager for explanations as the county continues reviewing financial records and procedures. WIBW reported that some employees within the sheriff's office are also experiencing the same problems.

Osage County officials said further information will be shared as the review progresses.