

OPINION

BOCC . . .

(Continued from page 1)

general, distracted driving, impaired driving, “school bus stop sign arm enforcement,” “seat belt enforcement,” and “construction zone enforcement.”

The statement concluded with the following paragraph: “The goal of this grant is to make Jefferson County safer, to reduce the number of injury and fatal accidents in Jefferson County. Sheriff Bacon would like every citizen of Jefferson County to slow down when driving, keep their cell phone out of their hands, and pay attention when driving the roadways of Jefferson County. Jefferson County is a great place to live, together we can make it safer for everyone.”

Vehicle fee
In other business during the Monday afternoon meeting at the courthouse, County Commissioners David Christy, Doug Walbridge, and Rich Jobbins passed Resolution 2026-026, which establishes an \$8 fee for each motor vehicle transaction handled by the Office of the County Treasurer, effective at the beginning of 2027 and continuing through 2029.

The current fee, which took effect July 1, is \$1 per transaction and was established through Senate Bill 404.

County Treasurer Douglas Bond told Christy, Walbridge, and Jobbins that they were free to set the fee as low as \$5 and as high as \$10 and that it was his recommendation that the fee be \$8. He also told the trio that based on three months’ worth of data that had been collected by his office, the \$8 fee would bring in somewhere between \$200,000 and \$230,000 over the course of a year.

Bond said the revenue derived from the fee would be enough to cover both the payroll for the motor vehicle employees in his office and printing costs.

According to the county treasurer, about 2,400 motor vehicle transactions take place in his office each month.

Bond reminded the commissioners that the next county tax sale would be held that Thursday. He said 73 tax-delinquent properties would now be offered to prospective bidders and that that figure could be down to 72 by the time the sale got underway. He said one property owner had already paid the back taxes on their property and that another might be doing so.

EMS building at Perry
Emergency Services Director James Tweed reported that he was waiting for Kearney & Son Inc., rural Valley Falls, to start building an addition to the Emergency Medical Services facility in Perry, EMS 3. He said some concrete that was recently poured at the site needed to dry first.

Tweed also reported that Auxiliary Services employees would be doing some remodeling at the EMS facility in Oskaloosa, EMS 1.

Asphalt on Wellman
Public Works Director Ben Domann informed the board that the Road and Bridge Department had finished applying asphalt to 58th Street as needed and had returned to Wellman Road to continue applying asphalt to it as needed. He said the work crew was moving south along Wellman toward 118th Street.

Domann told the commissioners that Road and Bridge employees were getting ready to resume the mowing of ditches along the paved and gravel roads, and that workers would be retrieving the gravel from along the edges of the gravel roads, gravel that has created what he called “double ditches.”

Domann reported that in the near future Finney & Turnipseed Transportation & Civil Engineering LLC, Topeka, would be doing some surveying in connection with the planned replacement of the bridge located along Ferguson Road roughly a quarter of a mile south of K-16. He said that while the county is under no obligation to have a new bridge in place until sometime in 2028, he hopes that the bridge can be constructed next year.

The commissioners learned from Domann that he would be sending the foreman of his brush crew to Ottawa for training two days later.

Finally, the Public Works director told the commissioners that he was attempting to arrange for his motor grader operators to receive some training this fall.

Phone contract
Voting 3-0, the board OK’d a proposed three-year contract between the county and Vonage covering the operation of the county’s phone system.

The action was taken following the presentation of some information, specifically a “Phone System Cost Comparison,” by Information Technology Administrator Scott Ribordy. According to this information, Vonage will be charging the county \$1,788.66 a month, or \$64,391.76 over a 36-month period, to provide it with phone services. The county has been paying Vonage \$2,580.76 a month, or \$30,969.12 a year, for phone services.

By sticking with Vonage for three more years, the county stands to save \$792.10 a month, \$9,505.20 a year, and \$28,515.60 over the life of the contract, according to the information. That represents a savings of 30.7%.

Ribordy obtained quotes from two other providers, Access Systems and Allegiant/Crexendo, for the commissioners to consider. Access Systems wanted \$2,054 a month, or \$73,944 for three years, for phone services, and Allegiant/Crexendo gave the Information Technology administrator a price of \$1,830.27 a month, or \$75,237.85 for three years, for phone services. The Allegiant/Crexendo quote included a 9% “administrative cost recovery fee” and a one-time charge of \$9,348.

Health insurance cost
Deputy County Clerk Katlyn Farrell announced that Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas had informed the county that its health insurance premium for 2027 would be increasing by 24%. She went on to say that the budget put together for next year was crafted with the expectation that the premium would be going up by 8% at the most. But she also reported that after taking a second look at the county’s current plan and by drawing on some reserve funds, the county had been able to lower the possible rate hike

from 24% to 16%.

Farrell’s announcement came on the heels of an executive session that had been requested by County Clerk Julie Dunkle and which ultimately lasted 15 minutes. The closed-door conversation was held so that County Counselor Josh Ney could give the commissioners, Dunkle, and Farrell legal advice under the attorney-client privilege exception to the Kansas Open Meetings Act. “Contract review” was identified as being the subject that was to be discussed.

Farrell told Christy, Walbridge, and Jobbins that the higher premium would cost the county in excess of \$200,000. She also told them that two options they could consider in trying to reduce the size of the increase were raising the deductible for an individual employee from \$1,000 to \$1,500, and asking employees to share in the cost of their dental coverage. According to her, the county pays the entire cost of dental coverage at this time.

“I had a gut feeling this (the big increase in the premium) was going to happen,” Walbridge told Farrell and his fellow commissioners.

Frustrated by the situation, Christy asked Ney at one point if there was any way the county could force BCBS of Kansas to provide it with a notice of an increase in the premium prior to the public hearing on the budget. “This (the whole process) is crazy,” he remarked.

Farrell told the commissioners at one point that she needed to notify BCBS of Kansas of the county’s official response to the higher premium either that day or the following Monday. It was the consensus of the board that further consideration of the premium be tabled until the following Monday.

Sewer district consolidation
Community Development Director Stephan Metzger reported that his office has been meeting with representatives of the seven sewer districts in the county and would be meeting with Jefferson County Sewer District No. 6 personnel one more time the following week in regard to the possible consolidation of all the districts. He said the meetings have been “well attended” and that the response to this proposal has been “pretty positive” so far.

Metzger told Christy, Walbridge, and Jobbins that he would be making a presentation to them covering the proposal during their meeting Monday, Nov. 2.

Animal control
Hayley Cannon, the clerk for Lakeside Village, appeared before the commissioners to initiate a conversation with them about the general absence of animal control in Jefferson County. “How do we get animal control in this county?” she asked.

Cannon told Christy, Walbridge, and Jobbins that residents of the county who don’t live in one of the cities have been instructed by others to call the sheriff’s office whenever the need for animal control has arisen but that when they talk to one of the deputies on the phone, he or she tells them that there is nothing the sheriff’s office can do about the problem.

She also told them that she receives “constant complaints” about animals reportedly running at large.

Ney told Cannon that although some counties have managed to contract with a shelter to have them handle animal control, it had been his experience that counties generally struggle to find a shelter that is willing to accept and care for stray animals. “It’s a very gray area in terms of what people’s options are,” he observed.

Cannon asked the commissioners if Jefferson County had ever had an animal control operation, and Walbridge replied by telling her he wasn’t aware of such an operation having ever existed.

“The reality is you have a lot of people dumping (unwanted animals),” Ney said at one point, reminding everyone of what cities and land owners in the unincorporated areas of the county are up against all the time. “Everyone’s on their own.”

The county counselor said the “next level” of animal control in Jefferson County would involve the county contracting with a dog catcher or a shelter to deal with stray animals on the loose.

That idea certainly resonated with Cannon, who remarked, “I think it would be beneficial to look into this.”

Zoning cases

On separate 3-0 votes, the board approved two two-part zoning cases, PR2026-09 and Z2026-09, and PR2026-10 and Z2026-10, and the resolutions connected to the requested zoning changes, Resolution Z2026-09 and Resolution Z2026-10.

PR stands for plat review. PR2026-09 encompassed a request from Payke Brown and Steven P. and Wendy M. Speer to consider the final plat of PJ Acres, a proposed two-lot subdivision covering 15.34 acres to be located at 2657 Barton Road, Grantville.

Z2026-09 encompassed a request from Brown and the Speers to rezone all of an existing tract of land and part of another existing tract, a larger tract, shifting what would become Lot 1 from the Rural Residential classification to the Suburban Residential classification.

Lot 2 would continue to be zoned Rural Residential.

When the Planning Commission met Aug. 24 to take up the case, it twice voted 6-0 to recommend to the board that Brown’s and the Speers’ requests be approved.

PR2026-10 encompassed a request from Nathan and Melissa Jolley and The Jolley Family Trust to consider the final plat of Scenic Vista Acres, a proposed three-lot subdivision covering 49.9 acres to be located at 20216 K-92 Highway and 11841 259th Street, McLouth.

Z2026-10 encompassed a request from the Jolleys and the trust to rezone Lot 1 of what had been the New Vista subdivision, switching it from the Suburban Residential classification to the Rural Residential classification.

When the PC dealt with the case in August, it twice voted 6-0 to recommend to the board that the Jolleys’ and the trust’s requests be approved.

The cases were presented to the commissioners for their consideration by Metzger.

The board OK’d SE2026-11 on a 3-0 vote, clearing the way

for Gary’s Berries LLC, 5991 17th Street, Grantville, to receive a Special Event Permit that will enable the business to offer additional parking during Gary’s Farm Fest this fall.

Before the vote was taken Metzger informed Christy, Walbridge and Jobbins that Gary’s Berries had complied with the terms of its Conditional Use Permit by having dust-suppression materials applied to portions of 17th Street and Decatur Road, and subjecting a sample of its drinking water to testing by a laboratory.

According to Gary’s Berries’ application for the permit, Gary’s Farm Fest got underway this past Saturday and will resume Saturday, Oct. 17. Other dates are Sunday, Oct. 18, Saturday, Oct. 24, and Sunday, Oct. 25.

The hours for the event are 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sundays.

The commissioners had a brief discussion with Ken Newman of McLouth, the owner of Rock On LLC, in regard to the approved demolition of the furnished trailer at 10904 Navajo Lane in Lake Shore Estates. Christy told Newman that they would prefer for him to avoid burning the structure if at all possible.

As previously reported in the paper, the county is paying Newman \$8,500 to clean up three lots in Block T of Lake Shore Estates, ground on which the trailer is located.

In response to a question posed by one of the commissioners, Newman said he had done some mowing at the lots but wouldn’t be tackling the trailer project until after he has returned from a “vacation” in Wichita.

Employees honored

The board was prepared to hand out soon-to-be-framed Certificates of Appreciation to two county employees, but neither one of them could be present for the meeting.

Melissa Fialkowski will be getting a Certificate of Appreciation and a pin for 25 years of service to the county, and Darren Brown a Certificate of Appreciation and a pin for five years of service to the county.

Both Fialkowski and Brown are employed by the sheriff’s office.

Land bank transfers

Voting 3-0, the board authorized Christy to sign on its

behalf nine Quit Claim deeds conveying 35 lots in Lake Shore Estates, Lakewood Hills, Lakeside Village, Lake Ridge Estates, and the Indian Ridge subdivision from the Jefferson County Land Bank to their new owners.

Those lots and 17 others in Lakeside Village were sold during the Land Bank session Sept. 21.

Bond announced that the bid on Certificate of Deposit “C” had been awarded to Denison State Bank in Meriden and that the bank would be paying the county 4.12% in interest during the next six months.

The CD, which is in the amount of \$2 million, was already on deposit with DSB.

The board OK’d the proposed employee calendar for 2027 on a 3-0 vote. The calendar calls for the county to observe 12 holidays next year: New Year’s Day, Friday, Jan. 1; Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Monday, Jan. 18; Presidents’ Day, Monday, Feb. 15; Memorial Day, Monday, May 31; Independence Day, Monday, July 5; Labor Day, Monday, Sept. 6; Veterans Day, Thursday, Nov. 11; Thanksgiving, Thursday, Nov. 25; the day after Thanksgiving, Friday, Nov. 26; Christmas Eve, Friday, Dec. 24; Christmas Day, Monday, Dec. 27; and New Year’s Day 2028, Friday, Dec. 31.

Finally, Walbridge announced that he, Jobbins and other county officials had traveled to Manhattan the previous Friday for the Northeast Kansas County Officials meeting hosted by Riley County. “No county business was discussed amongst us,” he related.

The first-term commissioner went on to report that county officials from other counties commended Jefferson County for its current moratorium on the acceptance of applications to operate data centers.

Executive session

At the request of Metzger, the commissioners ultimately met privately with him for 15 minutes for the stated purpose of holding a preliminary discussion relating to the possible acquisition of real property. Bond and Ney were invited to remain in the room for the closed-door conversation and did. Afterward, Christy announced that no binding action was taken.

The meeting, which included a five-minute recess, adjourned at 2:57 p.m.



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