

Solar developer again asks commissioners to lift moratorium as county reviews zoning plans

CRAWFORD COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING – MARCH 6, 2026

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

►► The Crawford County Commission met Friday morning, March 6, opening bids, conducting a public hearing on a road vacation in Arma, and hearing another request from Shasta Power representatives to lift the county's moratorium on commercial solar projects.

Commission Chair Bruce Blair presided over the meeting at the Crawford County Courthouse, along with commissioners Tom Moody, Carl Wood, County Counselor Jim Emerson, and County Clerk Lisa Lusker.

The meeting began with the opening of bids for culverts. Metal Culverts, Inc. submitted a no-bid. J&J Drainage Products submitted a total bid of \$69,561.40. Bo's One Stop submitted a bid of \$60,295.20, while Wellborn Sales submitted the lowest bid at \$59,142.60. Ferguson Waterworks submitted a bid of \$66,213 before tax. Commissioners directed staff to review the bids and return with a recommendation before awarding a contract.

Bids were also opened for lawn care and mowing services. S&B Lawn Care submitted a bid of \$400 per courthouse lawn mulch and leaf removal, with additional per-location mowing prices including \$700 for the Health Department, \$60 for Frontenac EMS, \$35 for Pittsburg EMS, \$30 for the Judicial Center, and \$100 for the Girard courthouse. TR Construction submitted a bid of \$500 per courthouse mulch, along with \$75 for the Health Department, \$50 each

for the Frontenac and Pittsburg EMS stations, \$75 for the Judicial Center, and \$250 for the courthouse. Commissioners again directed staff to review the bids before making a recommendation.

The commission then conducted a public hearing to vacate a road and alley segments located in Martin Kane's 2nd Addition in the City of Arma. With no public comment offered, the hearing was closed and the commission adopted Resolution 2026-012, formally vacating South Street, a portion of Kane Street, and an alley identified in the subdivision plat.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, John Kopiaik of Shasta Power again addressed the commission regarding the company's proposed solar project near Mulberry.

Kopiaik reviewed his experience in solar development and the background of Shasta Power, which he said has been involved in renewable energy projects since 2007 and began developing projects under its current partnership in 2018. He said the company began pursuing the Crawford County project in 2022, but progress has been halted by the county's moratorium on utility-scale solar projects that was first enacted in May 2024 and later extended.

According to Kopiaik, the moratorium prevents the company from obtaining the financing needed to keep the project viable.

"Our project is completely stuck under moratorium," Kopiaik said. "We cannot fund interconnection deposits

because it's too risky to lay out \$15 million under a moratorium."

Kopiaik explained that Shasta Power has an interconnection position in the Southwest Power Pool queue and previously faced a February deadline to continue the process with a multi-million-dollar deposit. After numerous other projects withdrew from the queue, he said SPP recalculated the system impacts and pushed the next deadline to March 18.

Kopiaik asked commissioners to either lift the moratorium entirely or grant a specific exemption for the Mulberry project so the company could continue financing and planning work.

The developer also presented the results of a survey he conducted among nearby homeowners. Kopiaik said he identified 37 homes near the proposed project area and spoke with 36 of them. According to his figures, 23 homeowners signed in favor of the project, nine opposed it, and five chose to abstain.

"If you look at that numerically, it's 72 percent have signed yes out of those that have responded," Kopiaik said.

Kopiaik also reiterated the project's economic claims, stating that it would represent approximately a \$400 million investment in Crawford County. He said the project could generate roughly \$61 million for the county over time, \$4 million for the City of Mulberry, \$2.5 million for the local fire district, and about \$220,000 in payments to neighboring landowners.

Commissioners responded cautiously, noting that the county is still reviewing a proposed comprehensive plan and zoning regulations that could include rules governing solar and other industrial developments.

Commissioner Tom Moody noted that even if the moratorium were lifted, the project would still need to pass through the county's planning and zoning process.

Commissioner Blair also pointed out that lifting the moratorium would apply to all potential projects countywide, not just the Shasta Power proposal. "The risk I see is it's not just your project," Blair said, referencing other potential wind and energy proposals that have been discussed in the county.

Another representative with the project, who did not identify himself during the meeting, echoed Kopiaik's request and argued that removing the moratorium would simply allow development work to proceed while leaving final permitting authority with the county.

Commissioners did not take action on the request. Generator financing resolution approved

County Counselor Jim Emerson presented Resolution 2026-011, authorizing a lease-purchase financing agreement between Crawford County and Labette Bank for a generator for the county jail. Emerson explained the resolution had originally been approved the previous year but needed to be reissued due to the change in commission leadership in 2026.

The commission approved the resolution, allowing the lease agreement to move forward.

Solid waste plan reviewed

Commissioners also approved the annual review of the Crawford County Solid Waste Management Plan following a recent meeting of the county's solid waste committee.

During the discussion, Blair highlighted the county's monthly opportunity for residents to dispose of household waste at the landfill in Arcadia at no charge. Blair encouraged residents to take advantage of the program and noted that loads must be properly secured.

"If you've ever been there, it's not that bad," Blair said. "You go through, you give them your tag number... you back up, you throw your stuff out, you drive back out."

He emphasized that drivers must tarp their loads when hauling trash.

"Tarp your load or they turn you away," Blair said.

Officials said the program allows residents to bring items that fit within a typical pickup load, though hazardous materials remain restricted.

Commissioners discuss litter and untarped trucks. Later in the meeting, Commissioner Carl Wood raised concerns about trash falling from trucks along county roads. Wood said he had observed multiple transfer trucks traveling without tarps and losing debris.

"That's one of the troubles that we have," Wood said, describing

trash blowing from trucks onto roadways.

Wood said the county had received multiple complaints and crews were cleaning debris along roads such as 250th Street. He said the county may pursue enforcement against companies that fail to secure loads or use designated routes.

"It's taxpayers' money cleaning it up today," Wood said.

Additional discussions

Commissioners briefly discussed zoning topics connected to the county's ongoing comprehensive plan process, including questions about tiny homes and manufactured housing regulations.

Emerson noted that the comprehensive plan draft is still under development and zoning discussions are in the early stages.

Commissioners indicated they may forward suggestions to the planning and zoning board while the draft regulations are still under review.

Executive session and upcoming meetings

The commission later entered a 15-minute executive session to discuss non-elected personnel related to LEPP (Local Emergency Planning Program) matters before returning to open session.

Before adjourning, commissioners reviewed upcoming county business, including the March 10 canvass of ballots from the Frontenac sales tax special election and a future work session at the Judicial Center scheduled for April 7.

The meeting adjourned shortly after late-morning business concluded.

Commission approves subdivision, hears mental health and transit updates

CRAWFORD COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING – MARCH 10, 2026

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

►► The Crawford County Commission met Tuesday morning at the courthouse in Girard, addressing a range of items including certification of the recent election results in Frontenac, approval of a rural subdivision, updates from the county mental health department and SEK-CAP's general public transportation system, and several administrative actions.

The meeting opened with approval of the minutes from the March 6 meeting before commissioners recessed briefly to convene as the county Board of Canvassers to finalize the results of the Frontenac sales tax vote. County Clerk Lisa Lusker presented two provisional ballots for review, explaining that both voters had moved within the same district and recommending that the ballots be counted.

Commissioners approved the recommendation and accepted the final results. Lusker reported that voter turnout for the election was approximately 14.5 percent. The final tally showed 355 votes in favor and 21 opposed. After certifying the results, the board of canvassers adjourned and commissioners resumed the regular meeting.

Zoning Administrator May Smith then presented a subdivision request for property located near 190th Street and 580th Avenue, in the area commonly known as the former Red Fox Recreation

Area. The land is owned by Margaret Brody, who requested the creation of four lots, primarily for estate planning to allow land transfers within the family. Smith explained that the owner's home is located on one of the proposed lots and that the subdivision is not intended to function as a typical development project. "This is more of estate planning than actual doing this as a developer," Smith said while describing the proposal.

Smith noted that rural water service is currently unavailable for several of the proposed lots but could potentially be extended in the future as improvements are made to the rural water district's infrastructure. The subdivision resolution includes a condition prohibiting construction on the new lots unless a water source is secured. Planning and zoning officials had previously recommended approval of the request by an 8-0 vote with one member absent. Commissioners approved the request by adopting Resolution 2026-010.

Heather McCully, director of the Crawford County Mental Health Center, appeared next to recommend the appointment of Michelle Bullis to the county's mental health governing board. McCully described Bullis as a psychiatric nurse practitioner who works at the Ozark Center in Joplin, a Pittsburg State University graduate and a U.S. Air Force veteran. Commissioners approved the appointment.

McCully also provided a brief overview of the center's annual report for 2025, highlighting significant growth in services since the organization became a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic in 2022. She said the center served more than 3,000 clients and provided roughly 193,000 services during the past year. Prior to the designation, the center served fewer than 1,200 clients annually and delivered fewer than 60,000 services. McCully said the demographics of those served reflect economic challenges within the community. She reported that 87 percent of clients who report income fall at or below the federal poverty level, while 38 percent have no insurance coverage. She also noted that about one-quarter of those who report housing status are homeless.

McCully discussed several program expansions, including crisis services and a new autism treatment program that opened in August and provides intensive services for children with autism and co-occurring mental health needs. She told commissioners that the center recorded approximately \$22 million in revenue and expenses in 2025 but continues to face a financial gap because many services must be provided regardless of a patient's ability to pay. According to McCully, the center delivers roughly \$5.6 million in services each year that are not reimbursed

through insurance or other funding sources.

Representatives of SEK-CAP also addressed commissioners regarding ongoing funding challenges for their public transportation services in the county. They explained that the organization previously operated multiple routes but currently runs only one general public route serving both Pittsburg and the rest of Crawford County after other routes were suspended. The service reduction occurred after federal grant funding was reduced and pandemic-era relief funds expired. SEK-CAP told commissioners that operating a single route across the entire county significantly limits the number of riders who can be served each day because of travel distances and time required to transport passengers from rural areas.

Casey Brown and Jamey Whitney said operating each route requires approximately \$40,000 in annual support. The county is currently contributing \$14,901 to secure the one, limited route through the end of SEK-CAP's fiscal year. Additional funding is needed to restore and maintain the other two general public routes. Whitney said they are meeting with several cities and organizations in hopes of securing additional contributions and are also working with state officials regarding funding issues. They cautioned that without additional support, service reductions may continue.

County Clerk Lusker later presented the February 2026 clerk's report, which commissioners approved by roll call vote. Lusker also presented a request from J.T. Construction for payment related to a county building project, which commissioners approved.

County Counselor Jim Emerson presented several items during the meeting. Emerson asked commissioners to approve the signature page for a series of Kansas Department of Health and Environment grant applications for the Crawford County Health Department. The applications total slightly more than \$1 million and include programs related to maternal and child health services, immunization efforts, chronic disease prevention and other public health initiatives. Emerson explained that the amounts requested are preliminary and that the health department will return later to review final award amounts once they are announced. Commissioners approved the application submission.

Emerson also requested approval to publish notice of a public hearing regarding road improvements in the Prairie View Estates subdivision. The improvements totaled \$53,264 and would be assessed among ten property owners in the subdivision at roughly \$5,300 per lot unless property owners choose to pay the cost in full following the hearing.

Commissioners approved publishing the notice.

Another item presented by Emerson involved a lease-purchase agreement with Labette Bank to finance a new generator for the Crawford County Sheriff's Department and jail. Emerson said the existing generator has reached the end of its service life after approximately 30 years and must be replaced to ensure the jail can operate during power outages. The new generator will cost \$96,375 and will be financed over 36 months at an interest rate of 3.75 percent, with monthly payments of approximately \$2,834. Commissioners approved the agreement.

Under old business, Emerson also presented a recommendation regarding mowing services for county properties. Commissioners accepted the low bid from S&B Lawn Care to perform the work.

At the end of the meeting, commissioners entered a 15-minute executive session with Emerson to discuss the job performance of a non-elected employee. No action was taken following the session.

Before adjourning, commissioners reviewed several upcoming items of county business, including a March 13 work session to sign mid-month bills and payroll vouchers, a March 20 public hearing regarding vacating a platted alley in Opolis, and the March 24 opening of dust control bids.

The meeting then adjourned.