

Leases cancelled for Auburn Harvest Wind Project

Steelhead Americas has terminated all wind energy ground leases for the Auburn Harvest Wind Project in Osage County, marking a formal end to plans for a large-scale wind farm after local and national forces constrained the development's prospects.

The proposed project, which would have included dozens of turbines and marketed as generating renewable power for thousands of homes, had support from participating landowners. But local policy changes and broader shifts in the energy landscape forced Steelhead Americas to walk away.

Matt Copeman, External Communications Lead for

Vestas - American Wind Technology, Inc., said in a written statement that the company "made the difficult decision to terminate the Wind Energy Ground Lease(s)" because Osage County adopted a policy that bars wind and solar energy developments.

"In late 2022, the Osage County Commission unanimously approved a recommendation prohibiting wind farms and solar energy developments within county limits," Copeman said. "As a result, the Auburn Harvest Wind Project could not move forward, despite strong support from local landowners. Given these circumstances, Steelhead Americas has made the difficult decision to termi-

nate the Wind Energy Ground Lease(s). This outcome is especially disappointing considering the significant benefits the project would have brought to Osage County, including direct investment to local landowners, hundreds of new jobs, and increased tax revenue. We remain grateful to the landowners and community partners who supported this project with integrity and good faith."

The cancellation in Osage County comes as wind farm development has faced increased hurdles nationwide. Federal policy uncertainty has grown in recent years, with the federal government slowing or pausing permits and leases for both onshore and offshore

wind projects, citing concerns ranging from regulatory reviews to national security issues. Some previously planned offshore wind initiatives - once expected to power hundreds of thousands of homes and create thousands of jobs - have been delayed or dropped in the face of federal actions and changing investment conditions.

Funding dynamics have also changed. Tax incentives and credits that helped spur earlier wind energy investment are less certain under current federal policy, contributing to an overall decline in wind and solar investment nationwide. In the first half of 2025, wind and solar investments fell compared with the previous year,

in part reflecting shifts in tax law and investment priorities.

Public views on energy sources have evolved as well. While wind power retains support among many Americans, other forms of energy, like nuclear power, have seen increased favor in recent years, reflecting broader debates about reliability, cost and energy independence.

The Auburn Harvest Wind Project had been marketed as an economic opportunity for Osage County, promising construction activity, jobs, and long-term revenue from local taxes and landowner payments. With the leases now terminated, those potential benefits will not be realized.



Lori Kuykendall, Contributor

Winners of the 2025 conservation poster and limerick contests were recognized during the Osage County Conservation District's annual meeting, held Jan. 26 at the Osage City school.

Osage County Conservation District highlights accomplishments at annual meeting

Lori Kuykendall, Contributor

OSAGE CITY — The Osage County Conservation District (OCCD) held its annual meeting on Jan. 26 at the Osage City school, bringing together landowners, educators, students, and state and federal representatives to reflect on a year of conservation efforts and to recognize those who support soil and water stewardship across the county.

Vice Chairman David Combes called the meeting to order and opened the evening by thanking Osage County banks for sponsor-

ing the meal, which was prepared by USD 420 cooks and served by members of the Osage City Indians Club.

During the business portion of the meeting, elections were held for two board positions. Incumbent board members J.D. Urish and Keith Badger were re-elected. Treasurer Badger also presented the 2025 financial report, along with the minutes from the Jan. 27, 2025, meeting. Both were approved as presented.

Board member Adam Phelon delivered an update on conservation district activities, outlining

the mission and impact of the OCCD. He noted that conservation districts were created in response to the Dust Bowl era, with Kansas legislation in 1937 paving the way for local districts. Osage County was the third conservation district formed in the state, in 1939. Today, every Kansas county operates its own conservation district.

Phelon emphasized OCCD's role in managing erosion, improving soil health, and providing landowners with tools and

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Carbondale City Council

Mercury sets up shop

Gary Rush | Reporter

CARBONDALE — All members of the Carbondale City Council were available for the Feb. 2 regularly scheduled gathering of city government. Mayor Anthony DaPrato was on hand to oversee the proceedings, and opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

"I tried to watch the last meeting online, and the voices were garbled," former Councilwoman Cheryl Lister said during the public comment section of the meeting. City Clerk Emily Bessette assured her the past meeting experienced technical issues with online viewing and that the issue had been corrected.

"Mercury wireless is wanting to set up a liaison yard for their equipment in Carbondale," Bessette continued. "They are hoping to pay us \$1,000 a month for their liaison yard, which is what they are paying for a similar facility in Overbrook. They want to do a two-year contract, then month to month after that."

Members of the council were supplied with a suggested area near the city forestry dump on the road toward Carbondale West Lake.

"Will the road to the forestry dump be significant enough to manage the extra traffic the Mercury trucks would incur," Councilman Kevin Seals asked.

"There should be no problem with the road," City Maintenance Director Dustin Bretsnyder said.

After acknowledging that the extra income with such a small footprint to be made for the depot, the council decided by motion and unanimous vote to offer the depot site to Mercury Wireless to store their equipment.

"I would like to make a motion that we offer employment to Gavin Smith for the city maintenance office," Seals said when the gallery returned to council chambers after a 20-minute executive session to hold interviews for the maintenance position. "I would also like to offer Joshua Smith a similar position by motion."

The job offers were agreed upon by the remaining members of the city council, and both offers were accepted by the applicants.

The council reviewed a document provided by City Attorney Tom Barnes II that covered the legality of peddlers operating within the city limits.

After the review, which adjusted the hours when the act of peddling was allowed in city limits to conclude at 8 p.m. rather than 9 p.m., council members decided to accept the document and allow Barnes to formally pen the ordinance to put up for vote during an upcoming meeting.

Osage County Commission

Commissioners hear detailed development update

LYNDON — Osage County Commissioners met Jan. 27 at the Lyndon Courthouse, with Commissioners Brandon Smith, Heather Kuder and Les Holman present, along with County Clerk Michelle Morris. County Counselor Joshua Ney joined the meeting later.

Commissioners approved the agenda as amended, and heard a comprehensive economic development update from

Colleen Mendoza, Osage County's economic development director, who outlined grant activity, infrastructure planning, downtown revitalization efforts, and tourism initiatives across the county.

Mendoza reported that economic development efforts in 2025 and 2026 have taken place amid a tightening economy and shifting federal and state grant requirements. She said the county is

continuing work on a \$750,000 federal Safe Streets for All planning grant focused on improving sidewalks and street safety in local communities, noting the project experienced delays before being cleared to move forward.

She also detailed a joint application with the Osage County Road and Bridge Department

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Deputies return to full duty



Submitted

As of Jan. 28, Deputy Christian Moran, K9 Deputy James Cason, and Corporal Clayton Hartpence, the three deputies who were injured in the line of duty Nov. 15, 2025, have returned to full duty, and are back to serving the citizens of Osage County. Pictured are, from left, Sheriff Chris Wells, Undersheriff Scott Brenner, Deputy Christian Moran, K9 Deputy James Cason, Corporal Clayton Hartpence, Sgt. John Knapp, and Lt. Fred Nech.



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