

# Chapman / When work begins is important

FROM PAGE A1

wake of the tornado that leveled much of downtown Chapman on June 11, 2008.

"The 75 percent for the reconstruction is not in jeopardy," Bob Wilhelm, an official with the Kansas Division of Emergency Management, said at a meeting Wednesday night at the Carlton Community Center. "You do not have to start by July 9."

But there are consequences if ground is not broken by that date, Wilhelm told an audience that approached 100 people.

If work is not going to proceed by the one-year anniversary, the Federal Emergency Management Agency must grant an extension in order to preserve eligibility for assistance with cost of

temporary measures, such as modular classrooms and storage expenses.

## It's been demoralizing

Students in Chapman are currently in modular classrooms, an experience teachers at the meeting described as demoralizing and disruptive for students.

"I've had more discipline issues in the last three months," said Middle School Principal Bruce Hurford. "This has been a huge thing for our kids. We are in a situation where we can't deliver the same educational value."

Wilhelm explained that there is little guidance on what criteria FEMA will use in deciding whether to allow an extension when the one-year deadline is missed. Federal regulations simply say an extension

will be considered if there are "extenuating" circumstances.

Mickey Gamble, a public assistance specialist with FEMA, told the Salina Journal this week that extensions have been granted in the past because bond issues were initially defeated.

A more substantial deadline occurs Jan. 9, 2010, or 18 months from the disaster declaration.

"For permanent work, you have 18 months to complete that project," Wilhelm said. "If you cannot complete that project (in 18 months), you apply for an extension."

He emphasized that these extensions are granted by Kansas officials, not FEMA. While they are not automatic, he told the audience that they are available if

the community is making a good faith effort to move forward.

"We work hard to get you those extensions," he said.

Some of the people at the meeting said FEMA officials had told the Chapman School Board that money for reconstruction — not just money for temporary housing — would be jeopardized if construction is not started within one year. A fact sheet on the Chapman School District Web site appeared to repeat that message.

However, Wednesday evening, the fact sheet had been revised to emphasize that reimbursements for temporary measures would be jeopardized if the deadline is not met.

## Here's why they're bigger

Considerable time — the

meeting lasted more than an hour and a half — was spent discussing the fact that the Chapman high school, middle school and elementary school will be growing by almost 50 percent, from 212,000 square feet to 312,000 square feet.

Wilhelm stressed that federal funds will help reconstruct only equivalent buildings. The new buildings have been judged to be equivalent by FEMA, because they offer the same functionality, even though they are physically larger, he said.

The need for larger buildings derives from a domino effect. Before the tornado hit, the middle and elementary schools shared several spaces, including kitchen, dining and gym.

The middle school is in a flood plain, and in order to

be eligible for federal aid, the lot must be built up 4.5 feet to take it above the 500-year flood plain elevation. When that is done, there no longer is room in the immediate area for the elementary school, Wilhelm said.

The consequence is that both buildings now have spaces that previously were shared.

A letter from Brent Bowman, the Chapman school project architect, to Chapman Superintendent Tony Frieze notes increases in classroom and educational space:

- Elementary school, from 16,626 square feet to 19,823 square feet.
- Middle school, from 18,862 square feet to 24,742 square feet.
- High school, from 20,774 square feet to 28,744 square feet.

# Abilene / Sheriff would like three more jailers

FROM PAGE A1

that the long-range goal is to have three jailers working at all times.

"My stance then was we are understaffed in the jail," Hoffman said. "My stance today is we are still understaffed."

## Request goes unanswered

The request wasn't acted on Feb. 19 when a motion from Commissioner Sheila Biggs to hire a jailer was dropped for lack of a second. Commissioner Everett Kolling was not at the meeting, leaving Commissioner Joe Nold to second the motion.

Nold said Wednesday he would make the same decision today. At meetings before Feb. 19, he said, the commissioners had "figured out how to cut 10.4 percent from the (county) budget."

Then on the 19th, Nold said, he and Biggs were hit with a request to "add expenses." Plans to buy two patrol cars for the department were also nixed.

"It's tough economic times," Nold said. "We weren't offended by (Hoffman) asking."

While he understands the financial decision, Hoffman is steadfast in his opinion that the jail needs more jailers.

"I don't want to give anybody the impression that the jail itself is unsafe. We have a very nice facility," he said. "The jail has moved into the 21st century. The way we are staffing it has not."

The commissioners' decision was not taken personally.

"(Nold) made his denial based on what he thought was best for the financial state of the county," Hoffman said. "I made my request based on my experience and knowledge, in regard for the safety and security of the operation I'm responsible for."

The jail, with 40 beds and an average daily inmate population of 25, has nine jailers, supervisor included, who provide coverage around the clock. To add one more would require

\$35,000 for salary and benefits, Hoffman said, plus training, uniforms and equipment.

The sheriff's office has 11 regular patrol officers, counting the officer running the Drug Awareness Resistance Education program and a canine officer.

"We're OK on the patrol side, but the only reason we're OK is we have not reassigned anybody to narcotics," Hoffman said.

Moving an officer to the jail would leave his patrol crew short.

## It's a constant problem

Staffing is a constant problem at county jails, Saline County Sheriff Glen Kochanowski said. While funding shortfalls are understandable, he said, "You don't cut expenses on the safety side."

There are no state standards for jail staffing, Kochanowski said. The Saline County Jail — with 192 beds and a daily average in 2008 of 186 inmates — based its staffing on a consultant's advice.

Currently, the jail in Salina has between seven to nine jailers a shift, and just as in Abilene, Kochanowski said more are needed.

Hoffman said he didn't consult with anyone regarding staffing at the Dickinson County Jail, but rather, relied on his own experience.

While one jailer won't solve the staffing concerns, he said, "It's a step in the right direction."

Kochanowski suggested that Dickinson County commissioners listen to their sheriff.

"If he doesn't think he has enough staff to handle his prisoners, he doesn't have enough staff to keep his people safe. Then he has to keep his inmates safe," Kochanowski said. "If you don't have the staff to do what is needed to watch them, then you're going to have happen what happened."

## More mentally ill inmates

He said the number of Saline County Jail inmates with suicidal tendencies has grown.

"We are dealing with an increasing number of people with mental problems, people who don't have any place to go, but they end up in the jail," Kochanowski said.

At times, he said, there are three or more inmates on suicide watch. They are given paper clothing to wear and paper sheets for their beds, and are watched constantly.

While it's been about 10 years since the last suicide at the Saline County Jail, they can occur any time and any place, he said.

"Let's face it. You don't have enough eyes and ears to watch everything all the

time," Kochanowski said.

He backs Hoffman and his recommendation to add jail staff.

"I feel for the Abilene sheriff," Kochanowski said. "That bothers me that we place money importance over safety."

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# FEMA / Utilities to get reimbursed

FROM PAGE A1

over guidelines for assessing storm damage. The ice storm left nearly 60,000 cooperative members statewide without power.

The two sides met in December in Topeka for talks, after FEMA offered about \$39 million for what the rural power companies estimated was about \$340 million in damage from the deadly storm.

"The difficulty early on was that there wasn't any clarity or certainty how to make the damage assessment from an engineering perspective," said Stuart Lowry, executive vice president and general counsel for the cooperatives' association in Topeka.

The utilities complained

that the contractor's FEMA hired to survey the damage initially were inexperienced at judging the effects of ice storm damage on power lines. Those contractors also did their inspections in June and July, when damage to the lines was not necessarily as visible, Lowry said.

The discussions in December focused on an agreed-upon way to measure the damage.

DS&O has hired additional personnel and will add contractors to complete the three-year rebuilding process. FEMA's reimbursement will cover 75 percent of the cost of repair and replacement, the state of Kansas will cover 10 percent of the damage and DS&O will cover 15 percent, plus the cost of any upgrades or additional mitigation.

DS&O's sum includes several thousand dollars reimbursement for emergency repairs necessary immediately after the storm, said Don Hellwig, general manager of the utility.

The utility has already begun buying materials for the repairs, and its own repair crews should be at work within a matter of weeks, Hellwig said.

Without FEMA's reimbursement, it's likely that DS&O's customers would have faced a 9 to 10 percent rate increase to cover the repair costs, he said. The same is true of Bluestem's customers, said Ken Maginley, general manager.

Bluestem plans to do most of the repairs with its own crews, Maginley said. "As we get into it, and we're

not making the progress we expect, we may go out for contractor help later, he said.

Hellwig said he expects FEMA's statewide reimbursement to utilities to total between \$300 million and \$400 million.

DS&O's repairs by county:

- Dickinson, 128 miles of line with repair costs estimated at \$5,087,300.

- Saline, 85 miles with repair costs estimated at \$3,212,600.
- McPherson, 36 miles, \$1,390,500.
- Ottawa, 27 miles, \$1,073,000.
- Geary, 14 miles, \$530,000.
- Marion, 17 miles, \$619,800.
- Cloud, five miles, \$197,000.
- Morris, three miles, \$92,500.

## Briefly

### Salina in line for housing money

More than \$350,000 in federal money for the "development of workforce housing" is on the way to Salina, according to a news release issued late Wednesday by Salina Area Chamber of Commerce president/C.E.O. Dennis Lauver.

Lauver wrote in an e-mail that the Kansas congressional delegation played a role in securing \$368,750. The money is contained in legislation to fund the

federal government during fiscal 2009.

"The funds will be matched with approximately \$130,000 from the Salina Economic Development Strategic Plan to help us stimulate development of workforce housing in Salina," Lauver wrote.

"At this point, we know most but not all of the exact details associated with this return of federal money to Salina so there is some research to be completed before we move ahead."

Lauver wrote that, in the coming months, there

likely will be meetings with homebuilders, lenders and developers.

### Husband of missing mom faces charge

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The husband of a missing Kansas City mother has been charged with stealing a handgun.

Shon Pernice is accused of stealing the gun in late January, almost a month after his 35-year-old wife, Renee Pernice, went missing. Police believe she is dead and have named Per-

nice a person of interest in the case.

But prosecutors said the charge filed Wednesday is unrelated to the disappearance.

Pernice is being held on \$25,000 bond.

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