



Trump threatens mass firings of federal employees in a government shutdown

A4

RHID established but Pray’s Big Creek Estates project faces opposition

By Gaille Pike
Special to the Hays Daily News

On September 16, 2025, a Reinvestment Housing Incentive District (RHID) was established for developer Adam Pray’s Big Creek Estates project. Following a nearly hour-long Public Hearing on matter, Ellis County Commissioners unanimously approved Resolution 2025-16, establishing the Big Creek Estates 3rd Addition RHID, a proposed Development plan to construct 13 new homes in subdivision and approved the forming of a Developer Agreement.

Estimated RHID eligible costs total \$654,864 for the project to construct 13 new single family homes in the subdivision, with no up-front costs to the County. Mr. Pray will pay for the improvements to the property, with the RHID eligible development expenses reimbursed through property taxes paid in the RHID over 25 years. The project still requires approval of the Joint Planning & Zoning Commission, which will hold a Public hearing before making a recommendation to the County Commission. According to Environmental

Services Director Justin Craig, as of September 25, 2025, no paperwork on Big Creek Estates 3rd Addition has been received in his office, . The Joint Planning & Zoning Commission meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month. Per Director Craig, documents must be submitted one month before a scheduled meeting, therefore Joint Planning & Zoning Commission is not expected to review the Big Creek Estates 3rd Addition before its November, 2025 meeting. In advance of the September 16th RHID Public Hearing, the County received 25

protest petitions regarding the Big Creek Estates 3rd Addition RHID. Four citizens (Larry and Christy Dinkel, Joann Wilhelm and Duff Watson) chose to voiced their concerns directly to Commissioners. Mr. Watson also presented Commissioners with a resolution “in open opposition” to the RHID creation from the Big Creek Township Executive Board, which Chair Michael Berges read aloud. Chair Berges also acknowledged for the Public Hearing record citizens Kerry Tiernan, James Graham, David Reed and Myron and Monica Dreiling had

emailed Commissioners in opposition of the RHID creation. Opposition to the RHID creation focused on the impact of additional development in the subdivision on water resources, roads, and sewer costs. “We are all on private water wells. We’re worried about what the water status is like in that aquifer. What’s the plan to get water to us if something happens,” said Mr. Dinkel. He reported that he and his wife live on South View and that many of their neighbors share the same concern and have signed petitions against the RHID creation. Mr.

Duff stated during his comments that water is the number one thing the subdivision’s 300 current homes stand to lose if additional development is allowed. “I don’t know if you guys have seen that people are against the new development in that area,” Mr. Dinkel said. Mr. Dinkel also expressed concern that additional homes in the subdivision would lead to higher sewage costs, which have increased over the past few years from \$36 per month to \$56. He reported that in January 2026, the Big

SEE RHID A2

Some Kansas foster kids suffer ‘extreme’ instability as state still fails to fix longstanding issues

KCUR | By Noah Taborda

A new report reflects how Kansas is falling short of some its commitments to improve the state’s foster system. Kansas kids in foster care still face severe placement instability despite some marginal improvements to the state system. An audit by the Center for the Study of Social Policy reviewed the state’s performance in helping children in the state’s custody over the last year. Advocates described the annual report from the independent evaluator reviewing the state and its foster care

contractors as a “mixed bag.” The Kansas Department for Children and Families has now met eight of 14 obligations laid out in a 2020 lawsuit settlement. But the state is coming up short or falling behind for the other commitments. Leecia Welch, Deputy Legal Director for Children’s Rights, says the number of children struggling to find a permanent home in some parts of the state is still a major concern. “The report should be a wake-up call for anyone who cares about the well-being of children in Kansas,” Welch said.

“Each of these data points reflects a child whose life is in limbo — not knowing where she will sleep that night, missing school, and disconnected from family and friends.” In 2020, the state settled a lawsuit with child welfare advocacy group Kansas Appleseed over issues relating to instability for foster care children. The agreement included an annual evaluation and report by an independent party to check on the state’s promises to improve. This year, the state agency met four additional obligations



An annual audit of the state foster care system shows some improvements coupled with major regression in terms of placement stability and continued issues with mental health services. (Blaise Mesa/Kansas News Service)

SEE KIDS A2

County initiates talks with Ellis about 10th St Bridge, EMS Bldg, & Sales Tax

By Gaille Pike
Special to the Hays Daily News

Ellis City Council devoted over an hour of its September 15th meeting to a first “official” communication with the County representatives regarding the 10th Street Bridge, the County EMS building in Ellis and the future potential to relieve County property taxes with sales tax revenue. Ellis County Commission Chair Michael Berges and County Administrator Darin Myers were joined by Jordan Dettmer, a Bridge Engineer from Penco Engineering to present three ways to address the failing 10th Street Bridge in Ellis. Two designs (“Options A & B) would redeck the bridge,

using existing pylons which Mr. Dettmer described as in “fair condition.” The third, “Option C” would encompass a full bridge replacement, at a much higher cost than either Option A or B. Both the City of Ellis and the County intend to pursue grants for funding a 10th Street Project. County Administrator Darin Myers explained that the two entities would need to determine exactly which project is desired in order to pursue funding as well as agree on cost-sharing terms. County Administrator Myers suggested that an easy way to understand what the County is proposing is to imagine a standard county bridge, outside of any town,

which would be a 28 foot wide bridge (14 foot driving lanes) with guardrails. He stated the County would like the City of Ellis to pay for anything beyond a standard bridge, such as extra sidewalks or guardrails, while the County would be liable for the standard bridge, but first it needed to be decided whether a re-deck or total replacement would be pursued. “That way we can all look at our budgets once we know and then come back together and see how long we may need to push this back. So then we can continue to work together but we’re not rushing the City of Ellis into a project. At the same time, we don’t want to

SEE TAX A3

Ruder denounces Park’s no votes

By Gaille Pike
Special to the Hays Daily News

In a tense exchange at the September 22nd USD489 Board of Education (BOE) meeting Board Member Ruth Ruder denounced fellow Board Member Allen Park’s repeated no votes. The exchange followed a 6-1 (Park opposed) approval of the \$69,480 ACM Removal LLC bid to complete floor tile removal and asbestos-containing mastic abatement at the new Hays Middle School. “If we all voted no--Allen, my point is-- what if we all would have voted no? Could we be in trouble by the Health and Human Services Department for not removing asbestos that’s known? That’s the question I have with all of these no votes because are you just voting no to suffice the public that you’re not spending money? You know what, I’m going to put it out there. I’m going to put it out there right now, because if the rest of us would not vote and say the right thing for the kids and the safety of our children,” said BOE Member Ruder. BOE Member Park interrupted Ruder to say his vote against the bid was not about safety but was an objection about the process. “It has everything to do with safety. I want to talk about the safety of our kids. You have every right to vote the way you want to but I am sick and tired of every week that we come

here you have a not vote on something. It’s not right for the public. It isn’t right for our kids, and it isn’t right for our employees that work in the school district,” said BOE Member Ruder. “I think it’s a little presumptuous to think you know better than other people,” said BOE Member Yarmer. He stated that asbestos itself is not toxic if it’s not aerosolized so if it was under sealed flooring it is not a problem. “If it was a problem, then we should have taken care of it years and years ago,” BOE Member Yarmer said. “We’re talking about the process. I’m not voting that we shouldn’t do it. I’m voting that this is not the right process to do this. We don’t know for sure that is, well, what they say it is. I have some doubt on some of that,” said BOE Member Park. He stated that he had reviewed a report that stated there was no asbestos in the high school (which is being renovated into the new middle school) and that if asbestos had been put in after the report, whomever was responsible should come take it out. “I’m Number One on safety. I’ve been working for this District for over 40 years and working for safety. For you to say I’m not is not appropriate,” said BOE Member Park. He added that he understood BOE Member feeling that he continually votes no. “And that’s my right. You said it and it’s true. You question my vote. I have my own vote and you have your votes,” BOE Member Park said.