

Road: Axtell group

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that had been unanimously approved in December 2024.

“Marshall County commissioners are standing in the way of growth in our community,” said retired Axtell farmer Gary Ronnebaum in his prepared remarks.

Several residents described problems with the road which resulted in accidents, broken axles, vehicle damage, close calls due to poor visibility because of dust and tough driving conditions.

In his family alone, Ronnebaum estimated that in 1 million miles driven, there had been four accidents where the condition of 30th Road was a contributing factor in vehicles owned by his family. One resulted in a rollover where his two daughters in the vehicle were soaked in gasoline when they crawled out of the truck.

“This is the kind of chance that you are taking with our families by cancelling this project,” he said.

“We’ve waited 50 years waiting to see the only permanent solution,” Ronnebaum said.

A light rain or snow can make the road impassable or very difficult to drive, members of the delegation said.

Ronnebaum said he attended his first county commissioner meeting as a 20-year-old to ask for improvements on the road. Others who came that day have since died.

Ronnebaum said his generation was retiring and a new generation of taxpayers was taking over businesses and coming back to Axtell.

He identified 26 new homes that are served by 30th Road.

“Those homes have significant value,” he said.

Assessed valuation of Murray and St. Bridget townships and the town of Axtell is \$19,292,835 for the area served by 30th Road, he said, and taxpayers have sent an estimated \$868,148 in annual taxes to the county.

Ronnebaum described some of the projects the Axtell community has completed on its own without any public funds — a new restaurant, a new fitness center, a new grocery story, a rebuilt sports complex and a community center.

The group estimated there are 500,000 bushels of grain storage on this section of 30th Road and four seed dealers that receive multiple semi loads of seed annually.

He said improvements on 30th Road would open up new building sites for development. While the delegation said many would like to see three miles of overlay, they were asking for a mile and half.

Former county Commissioner Keith Bramhall, who along with former Commissioner Fritz Blaske, Waterville, and cur-

rent chairman Jon Ungerer voted for the project, told the commissioners they had the money to do the project and should get it done.

Bramhall said he never would have proposed the project if he knew the county didn’t have the money.

“Let’s get this project done,” he said. “You’ve got the money. We know it’s not going to get cheaper. Quit kicking the can down the road.”

He went through a budget report with county fund balances and said that as of July 31, there was more than \$5 million in the county’s capital improvement fund and more than \$370,000 in the risk management fund. The county will receive six more annual payments of \$400,000 for the Irish Creek Wind Farm, Bramhall said.

Estimated project cost in December was \$868,799.

Sitting commissioners Ungerer and Greg Meyer said there were budget concerns that contributed to their decision last week. Commissioner Austin Cline voted against stopping the project.

“Last year we didn’t have to raise the mill levy. This year we did,” Ungerer said. “That bothers me. I’m sure it bothers you.”

Meyer said he was concerned about money and had waited until the county budget was prepared to discuss abandoning the project.

Meyer said the commissioners had asked department heads to cut 3 to 5 percent.

He also pointed to a bridge replacement project north of Waterville where the county will need to have a design completed and 10 to 15 percent of the project cost available when it applies for Kansas Department of Transportation funding.

While the delegation recognized the need for other projects in the county, they asked why they had to wait when the project already was approved.

Ungerer said he hoped the road could be narrowed and improved with a good crown on it.

Several said narrowing the road would make it more dangerous.

Meyer said he had formed his opinion about the project before he was sworn in and generally was not in favor of an asphalt road that led to gravel.

Asked where they stood Monday, Meyer said he wanted to go back through the numbers.

“Today is too quick for me,” he said.

Ungerer said he thought it was worth reconsidering.

Cline asked Public Works administrator Mike Craig to contact Hall Brothers Inc., Marysville, about the price and bring those figures back at the next meeting.

Ungerer is scheduled to be gone for the next two meetings.



Submitted photo

Oren Holle, second from left on back row, participated in a national roundtable on soil health recently in Washington, D.C. To the right of Holle is U.S. Sen. Roger Marshall of Kansas, and next to Marshall is Lukas Koch of of Kelly Hills Unmanned Systems/Heinen Bros. Agra Services of Seneca. The event included U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr., fourth from left on front row.

Holle: Soil health impacts people's health

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perspective that organic farming is a viable part of the equation to address a growing concern for the continuing increase in chronic health issues.”

Holle, who has raised organic crops of corn, wheat, soybeans and alfalfa since 1992, said he was glad to share insights with experts in the field and hear their perspectives.

Both elder farmers, Holle and Montana organic producer Bob Quinn gave historical perspective on their many years in organic farming and “the perspective that crop production is possible without the high cost, and often proven, detrimental application of the host of new technologies that have been brought into the mainstream industrial model of agriculture,” Holle said.

Also on the panel was Dr. Chuck Rice, distinguished professor of microbiology at Kansas State University.

“In my opinion he made a fantastic case

for the returning to the basics of organic farming as realistic solution to our depleting soil health epidemic,” Holle said.

Also on the panel was Dr. Duriusch Mozaffarin of Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science Policy, who “very pointedly verified the connection of nutrition in our food to our long-term health,” Holle said.

Other roundtable participants included Atwood farmer Blaine Gunther of SureFire Ag and Lukas Koch of Kelly Hills Unmanned Systems/Heinen Bros. Agra Services of Seneca, and Ray Flickner, of Innovation Farm in Moundridge.

Holle said they “added the element of new and innovative technologies that have huge potential in reduction of the amount of chemicals needed for pest control.”

Holle, who is nearing retirement, is transitioning his farm operation to local organic farmer Steve Boyda.

Holle and Quinn

reminded Ag Secretary Rollins that the current Farm Bill and government-subsidized crop insurance reward the maximizing of yield “in fence row to fence row production, with an unbearable high cost of newly innovative technologies,” Holle said.

“These continue to become departures from addressing the need for a return to real-time soil health basics,” he said.

High input costs and continued overproduction of genetically modified crops “that our trading partners don’t even want, have caused the current dilemma of lost profitability opportunities and another round of loss of family farms,” he said.

Holle said he thanked Marshall in private conversation outside the session for continued support of soil conservation practices through the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Holle pointed to the need for program support for organic farming practices.

“We still fall far

short of a fair share of farm program funding compared to our share of the farm economy.”

Holle said the organic community needs to appreciate Marshall’s efforts to “build the communication bridge” between Kennedy and Rollins “in the Make America Great Again” mantra.

Holle said panelists should have had more time to exchange ideas after the roundtable.

“It was a personal disappointment that while we had already cleared security, as soon as the meeting ended we were promptly shoosed out of ‘our’ Capitol building.

“To me, it would have seemed logical that we at least could have spent some time to experience and admire the grandiose architecture of this amazing pillar of our democracy.”

But he said he holds hope the Trump administration will make “meaningful moves in a positive direction to address soil health issues.”

“It is long overdue.”

Bruna says Axtell road discussion held under attorney-client privilege

By Chris Pannbacker

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Marshall County counselor Anthony Bruna said at Monday’s county commissioners meeting that last week’s vote to not overlay 1.6 miles of road north of Axtell was done in open session.

He said there was a question about contract negotiations, but the discussion in closed session was done under the attorney-client privilege exemption of the Kansas Open Meetings Act, which has a broader legal application than discussion of contract negotiations.

“This is attorney-client privilege talked about in closed session. Why? For the simple fact that you have to know what you signed. Is a bid a bid or is a bid a contract? You have to know the legal ramifications for what’s out there and the ability, possibility to rescind something if you want to do it,” he said as he addressed the commissioners and the Axtell delegation who came to the meeting to oppose the commissioners’ vote.

As noted in the commissioners’ minutes for the July 28 meeting, the

commissioners, Bruna, County Clerk Sandy Wilson and Public Works administrator Mike Craig met in executive session to discuss matters of attorney-client privilege-contract negotiations. The original executive session was extended three times.

The information presented last December to commissioners from Hall Brothers was a bid. There was no contract signed for the project.

Debate needs to happen in open session, Bruna said.

Former county Commissioner Keith Bramhall said, “Anthony, there was no need for that executive session.” Bruna responded, “Respectfully, there was.”

During the meeting, Bramhall told Commissioner Jon Ungerer he should go down the hall to the county attorney’s office and self-report an open meeting violation.

When asked about notice of the commissioners’ agenda by Axtell taxpayers, Bruna said that public notice of the commissioners’

meetings is a meeting every Monday at 8:30 a.m. Members of the public can request a weekly agenda from the county clerk.

Later in the meeting, when asked by an Advocate reporter about the executive session, Bruna said, “As far as this instance it’s very important to know what is a contract and what isn’t.”

Bruna said there are times he has to review documents signed by county officials to determine exactly what they are.



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