It was a l-o-n-g day for the commissioners

by Rick Nichols

Complaints were frequent but compliments few and far between during last week's meeting of the Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners, which lasted more than two and a half hours and concluded with what amounted to an oldfashioned auction to sell a single lot that left the winning bidder more than \$3,000 poorer and the losing bidder more than a little perturbed over the whole thing.

Hilldale South subdivision residents Natalie Schweda and Rod Flowers appeared before County Commissioners David Christy, Richard Malm, and Doug Walbridge the afternoon of July 21 to make them well aware of their dissatisfaction with the operation of Jefferson County Rural Sewer District No. 11, which shares a two-cell lagoon with Jefferson County Rural Sewer District No. 10 (the Three Hills subdivision).

Schweda began by mentioning some brush that reportedly hadn't been burned by county employees like it should have been, a situation she described as "a health and safety concern," then brought up a promise she said the county had made to her and others in 2022 but hadn't

She also said she and her husband, Tom, have been paying the special assessments on 12 lots but "can't endure such a cost any longer." She even claimed at one point that the county hasn't been spending the money it is taking in through assessments on the maintenance of the sewer

After saying raw sewage can be smelled at Hilldale South, Schweda told the commissioners that a complaint pertaining to conditions in JCRWD No. 11 had been filed with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and then proceeded to threaten the county with legal action if the problem at Hilldale South — this is her take on the situation anyway — isn't re-

According to Schweda, the smell of raw sewage in the Hilldale South subdivision is "horrendous." She and her neighbors believe the smell is coming from open manholes.

Flowers stepped forward to share some pictures with the commissioners at one point and later told them that it wasn't "fair" to Hilldale South residents to be charged special assessments on vacant lots. "We need some kind of resolution," he said.

Flowers also took issue with the sewer bill he and his neighbors are expected to pay year after year. "It just keeps going up and up," he complained.

Schweda was upset with the commissioners about the tax burden she and her neighbors were having to bear. "You reported that the Road and

guys are raising our taxes and Bridge Department had "a lot of it stinks over here," she said.

Walbridge responded by telling her and Flowers, "You don't have enough money (in the sewer district account) to fix things. There's got to be funds available

Shortly later the first-term commissioner encouraged the Hilldale South residents present to either form a homeowners association or turn the subdivision into an improvement district, apparently in an effort to address the sewer district's financial situation.

Schweda also reported at one point that some of her neighbors were ready to relinquish the empty lots they own because they could no longer afford the special assessments on them. "We just want what's fair," she related, speaking for herself and

Entering the discussion, Christy said to Schweda, "Natalie, I haven't gotten back on this (the promise made three years ago) because we haven't made a

Health Department Administrator Crystal VanHoutan, R.N., was on hand for the discussion and assured Schweda and Flowers that environmental specialist Casey Keirns was already familiar with the sewer system issues at Hilldale South She also refuted a couple of claims put forth by Schweda, firmly saying, "That isn't true" each

Mike Fowler, 19582 13th Street, Lawrence, addressed the commissioners in regard to his property taxes and the condition of the gravel roads in his neighborhood. He asserted that his taxes have doubled since he moved to his current home in 2017, and he argued that the roads nearby aren't maintained like they should be and that the ditches that should be next to them are "non-existent."

"Why can't we just get basic stuff?" he asked. "I'm just asking for a smooth road and I can't get

Continuing to vent, he went on to say, "I've been here seven years and it (the situation) hasn't changed one bit. It's just

Fowler told the commissioners that he never sees a sheriff's deputy vehicle in his neighborhood and only recently spotted an Emergency Management vehicle. "I never see anybody," he remarked.

Turning his attention back to the roads, he said, "We need crown roads and not 'W' roads. What am I getting for my money if I can't even get a smooth road."

Road and bridge matters In other business during the board's weekly meeting at the courthouse in Oskaloosa, Public Works Director Ben Domann

repairs to do" in the wake of the thunderstorm that had rolled through Jefferson County a few days earlier. He mentioned the loss of a concrete box wall in the Dunavant community and two or three "tube failures" at that

Domann told the commissioners that the storm caused a lot of damage to roads and ditches and that he had approved overtime hours for his motor grader operators so that they could spend the additional time putting at least some of the gravel roads back in decent shape.

According to the Public Works director, the rain that fell from the sky "came in a hurry." He said the Oskaloosa area received 2" to 3" of precipitation and that the Winchester area got 5" of

Domann updated the board on the replacement of the old bridge north of Oskaloosa along McCall Drive, telling the commissioners that he was hopeful the project will be finished by the start of the 2025-2026 school

The board informally decided (i.e., no vote was taken) to table for a week a possible decision on the proposed purchase of a Robinair Premier R-1234yf Recover, Recycle and Recharge AC Machine for the county.

Domann told the commissioners that his department currently has to outsource the recharging of the air conditioning system in county-owned vehicles using the required coolant, 1234yf, but that he would like to be able to do this in house.

He also told the trio that the county now has 23 vehicles that will need to be recharged periodically, and in anticipation of more vehicles being acquired in the future, he said as many as 40 vehicles would be subject to the need for recharging.

Domann supplied the board with three quotes on the Robinair Premier R-1234yf Recover, Recycle and Recharge AC Machine, one from Northern Tool + Equipment, Lenexa, another from Grainger, Atlanta, Ga., and the third from the National Automotive Parts Association, Lake Forest, Ill.

Northern Tool + Equipment priced the Robinair at \$6,395, Grainger at \$10,291.38, and NAPA at \$6,409.02.

Domann told the board that surplus items from Road and Bridge, surplus items from Auxiliary Services, and an Emergency Management vehicle would be part of a Purple Wave auction scheduled to wrap up the next day. He said he would have a report for the commissioners covering the auction after the deadline for the submission of bids had passed.

Domann indicated to the commissioners that he needed

Proposed Budget for 2026

buy vehicles for his department.

Finally, the Public Works director informed the commissioners that two new weed sprayers were in Wichita waiting for Auxiliary Services employees to pick them up and haul them back to Jefferson County.

Conservation district Dr. Mike Piontkowski with the Jefferson County Conservation District appeared before the board to promote the environmentally-friendly work the conservation district does around the county in formally presenting its budget request for 2026. He also used the opportunity to thank the commissioners for their continuing support of the conservation district.

"I think you guys deserve a pat on the back," he said early on in his talk.

As John Wunder, the chairman of the JCCD board, and Cheli Helm, the manager of the JCCD office in Oskaloosa, listened, Dr. Piontkowski told Christy, Malm, and Walbridge that the amount of funding the conservation district receives from the state of Kansas is based at least in part on what it gets from the county.

Dr. Piontkowski said the JCCD supports the largest industry in the county, agriculture, through the various projects it carries out for the benefit of farmers and ranchers. "Without soil and water, agriculture in this county wouldn't be a viable business," he quickly pointed

Dr. Piontkowski noted that none of the projects the JCCD is involved in are short-term projects, describing them as "multigenerational, lasting projects" instead. He then mentioned the slogan that characterizes the day-to-day work of the JCCD and the mindset of those who are committed to the preservation of natural resources in their totality, "It's not ours, it's simply our

Dr. Piontkowski also related to the commissioners that the JCCD is backing all six of the high school vocational agriculture programs in the county with

The conservation district is seeking \$39,801 from the county to help fund its operations next

vear Land bank

After recessing the meeting so that the commissioners could meet as the directors of the Jefferson County Land Bank,

the proceeds from the auction to Christy, Malm, and Walbridge accepted bids on the lot at Lake Ridge Estates two men were really after, 10 lots at Lake Shore Estates, a lot at Lakewood Hills, and a lot in the Indian Ridge subdivision.

> Both Erik Monhollon, 6939 Shawnee Court, Ozawkie, and Lake Ridge Builders LLC, Lawrence, wanted Lot 31 in Block W of Lake Ridge Estates, Monhollon to protect the tree line to the south of the house where he and his family have lived for the past two years, and Lake Ridge Builders to complement the lot it acquired through the tax sale earlier this year, Lot 32. Measuring 70' x 130', Lot 31 is straight north of Lot 32.

> On Wednesday, July 16, Lake Ridge Builders submitted a bid in the amount of \$900, and sometime that same week Monhollon's wife, Lacey, supplied a bid in the amount of \$1.010.

> Representing Lake Ridge Builders, Bryan Sanders told the directors that the homeowners association for Lake Ridge Estates had rejected the company's plans to construct a home on Lot 32 alone but would allow it to build one on Lots 31 and 32. He also told them that he had been told by someone — it wasn't quite clear who — that if a lot was in the Land Bank, anyone who wanted that lot had a "99.9% chance" of securing it.

> If Lake Ridge Builders wasn't able to obtain Lot 31, it would be stuck with Lot 32, Sanders went

Monhollon told the directors that he and his wife had "no idea" someone else had made an offer on Lot 31. He also told them that his long-range goal was to construct a combination garage and shop on Lots 30 and 31 if he was able to purchase Lot 31.

Community Development Director Stephan Metzger told the commissioners that his office basically tells Land Bank lotseekers that simply having the high bid is no guarantee that the bidder will get the ground he or she wants, that the directors also take other factors into consideration, including the intended use of the property, in determining which bid is the best bid overall.

Sanders topped Mrs. Monhollon's offer right off the bat with a bid of \$1,025, then remarked, "I wish it (the sale process) would have been a little more clear."

Determined to land the lot, Monhollon came right back with a bid of \$2,100, prompting Sanders to make a counteroffer of

Monhollon followed with a bid of \$2,500, which led Sanders to push the possible sale price up to

Monhollon responded with an offer of \$3,000, then commented, "This is not what we were told at

Sanders answered Monhollon's bid with an offer of \$3,050, then Monhollon, ever so determined to walk away with the lot, decided to add \$1 to that figure to see if Sanders was still willing to go higher. He wasn't and the ground was sold to Monhollon for

Right after the board voted unanimously to favorably receive Monhollon's final bid on the lot, Metzger asked the commissioners if the Land Bank's policies should be changed to require that the directors always go with the high bid regardless of what the bidder wants the lot for. But it was County Counselor Josh Ney who answered the question, doing so with a firm No" and then saying that the directors needed the flexibility to be able to reject the high bid if they preferred a lower bid for some reason.

The directors also accepted the bid they got from Neil Ditty of Eudora on Lot 72, Lot 73, Lot 74, Lot 76, Lot 77, Lot 86, Lot 87. Lot 88. Lot 89 and Lot 90 in Block S of Lake Shore Estates, the bid that came in from James Barnes, 8927 Robin Lane, Ozawkie, on Lot 271 in Unit I of Lakewood Hills, and the bid on Lot 1 in Block C of the Indian Ridge subdivision that had been submitted by Spencer Estes, 9684 Cheyenne Road, Meriden.

Ditty offered to give the county \$500 for each of the lots, for a grand total of \$5,000.

Likewise, Barnes and Estes were up to parting with \$500 apiece to obtain their lots. According to information

Metzger shared with the commissioners and the paper, Ditty wanted the lots in order to construct a house there. Barnes and Estes, on the

other hand, are looking to extend their yards, Barnes to the east and Estes to the west.

According to Metzger, the new base bid table for Land Bank lots will go into effect August 1. That table was published in the July 17 issue of the paper.

The meeting was recessed for about half an hour to accommodate the business of the Land

See County Page 4

Proposed Budget 202

PUBLIC NOTICE

 $(Published\ in\ The\ Valley\ Falls\ Vindicator\ July\ 31,\ 2025) 1t$

NOTICE OF HEARING TO EXCEED REVENUE NEUTRAL RATE AND BUDGET HEARING

The governing body of Kaw Township and Kaw Fire District #1

Jefferson County
will meet on September 17, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. at Grantville Community Bld., 3877 South St., Grantville for the purpose of hearing and answering objections of taxpayers relating to the proposed use of all funds, the amount of ad valorem tax and the revenue neutral rate. Detailed budget information is available at Jefferson County Clerk's Office and will be available at this hearing BUDGET SUMMARY

Proposed Budget 2026 Expenditures and Amount of 2025 Ad Valorem Tax establish the maximum limits of the 2026 budget. Estimated Tax Rate is subject to change depending on the final assessed valuation.

Current Year Estimate 2025

	1	Actual		Actual		Amount of	Proposed
		Tax		Tax	Budget Authority	2025 Ad	Estimated
Fund	Expenditures	Rate*	Expenditures	Rate*	for Expenditures	Valorem Tax	Tax Rate*
General	60,093	2.442	60,000	2.260	64,870	54,569	2.300
Fire General	93,000	3.867	90,000	3.702	101,300	83,905	3.536
Totals	153,093	6.309	150,000	5.962	166,170	138,474	5.836
				Revenue	Neutral Rate-Towns	ship General**	2.157
				Re	venue Neutral Rate-	Fire District**	3.536
Less: Transfers	0		0		0		
Net Expenditure	153,093		150,000		166,170		
Total Tax Levied	136,979		135,144		xxxxxxxxxxxxxx		
Assessed Valuation:						•	
Township General	21,708,503		22,675,450		23,728,757		
Library							
Fire District	21,708,503		22,675,450		23,728,757		
Outstanding Indebtedness,							
Jan 1	2023		2024		2025		
G.O. Bonds	0		0		0	Ì	
Other	6,380		0		0		
Lease Purchase Principal	0		0		0		
Total	6,380		0		0		
*Tax rates are expressed in a	nills.	'	-			•	
**Revenue Neutral Rate as de	fined by KSA 79-29	88					
Douglas Brumbaugh, Tow	nship Treasurer						

PUBLIC NOTICE

(Published in The Valley Falls Vindicator July 31, 2025)1t NOTICE OF BUDGET HEARING

The governing body of Rock Creek Township and Rock Creek Fire District #5 Jefferson County

will meet on August 12, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. at 4570 94th St. Meriden, for the purpose of hearing and answering objections of taxpayers relating to the proposed use of all funds, the amount of ad valorem tax and the revenue neutral rate. Detailed budget information is available at Jefferson County Clerk's Office and will be available at this hearing. **BUDGET SUMMARY**

Proposed Budget 2026 Expenditures and Amount of 2025 Ad Valorem Tax establish the maximum limits of the 2026 budget. Estimated Tax Rate is subject to change depending on the final assessed valuation

	Prior Year Actual 2024		Current Year Estimate 2025		Proposed Budget 2026		
		Actual		Actual		Amount of	Proposed
		Tax		Tax	Budget Authority	2025 Ad	Estimated
Fund	Expenditures	Rate*	Expenditures	Rate*	for Expenditures	Valorem Tax	Tax Rate*
General	15,367	0.316	21,526	0.293	22,000	12,473	0.275
Fire General	200,000	3.578	150,000	3.361	422,600	185,549	3.159
Totals	215,367	3.894	171,526	3.654	444,600	198,022	3.434
				Revenue	Neutral Rate-Town	ship General**	0.275
				Re	venue Neutral Rate-	Fire District**	3.159
Less: Transfers	0		0		0		
Net Expenditure	215,367		171,526		444,600		
Total Tax Levied	198,398		198,128		xxxxxxxxxxxx]	
Assessed Valuation:							
Township General	39,881,991		51,484,738		45,369,515		
Library						[
Fire District	51,885,695		55,212,147		58,742,334	j	
Outstanding Indebtedness,							
Jan 1	2023		2024		2025		
G.O. Bonds	0		0		0		
Other	0		0		0	_	
Lease Purchase Principal	0		0		0	ĺ	
Total	0		0		0		
*Tov rotes are everessed in	mille					-	

**Revenue Neutral Rate as defined by KSA 79-2988 Gene Tarwater, Township Treasurer

PUBLIC NOTICE (Published in The Valley Falls Vindicator July 31, 2025)1t

NOTICE OF BUDGET HEARING

The governing body of City of Meriden

will meet on August 20, 2025 at 7:00 pm at City Hall for the purpose of hearing and answering objections of taxpayers relating to the proposed use of all funds and the amount of ad valorem tax. Detailed budget information is available at City Hall and will be available at this hearing. BUDGET SUMMARY

Proposed Budget 2026 Expenditures and Amount of 2025 Ad Valorem Tax establish the maximum limits of the 2026 budget. Estimated Tax Rate is subject to change depending on the final assessed valuation

Prior Year Actual for 2024 Current Year Estimate for 2025

							Proposed
		Actual Tax		Actual Tax	Budget Authority for	Amount of 2025	Estimated
, FUND	Expenditures	Rate*	Expenditures	Rate*	Expenditures	Ad Valorem Tax	Tax Rate*
General	529,874	30.263	496,900	28.388	588,600	235,405	25,578
Debt Service							
Library							
Employee Benefits	109,347	10.415	132,235	12.341	134,500	119,248	12.957
Law Enforcement	7,641	2.012	15,000	1.955	60,000	18,642	2.020
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Special Highway	321,607		72,500		135,892		
Special Parks and Recreation	7,617		7,000		12,028		
Court	·				4,517		
Infrastructure Maintenance	50,202		25,000		435,504		
Sewer Utility	262,937		301,288		710,076		
1				-			
7							
	117.035						
Totals	1,406,260	42.690	1,049,923	42.684	2,081,117	373,295	40.56
						ue Neutral Rate**	40.57
Less: Transfers	100,000		100,000		100,000		
Net Expenditure	1,306,260		949,923		1,981,117		
Total Tax Levied	343,023		340,983		XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX		
Assessed							
Valuation	7,987,759		8,748,317		9,203,462		
Outstanding Indebtedness,							
January 1,	2023		2024		2025	1	
G.O. Bonds	1,320,000		1,260,000		1,200,000		
Revenue Bonds	0		0		0		
AL			0				

1,260,000

1,200,000

Other 1,320,000 Total

*Tax rates are expressed in mills

Dawn Putnam City Clerk Official Title:

** Revenue Neutral Rate as defined by KSA 79-2988