

- ✓ February 10, 2017, Washington Co. Pilot-Tribune & Enterprise article, Flood resolution finally nearing completion
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- ✓ February 15, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Assessor will adjust controversial property tax valuations, but some homeowners will still see big increases

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- ✓ February 18, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Omaha, Papio-Missouri River NRD to host meeting on water pollution
- ✓ February 20, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, NRD official: Oroville Dam situation unlikely to happen in Omaha area
- ✓ February 22, 2017, Burt County Plaindealer article, Corps' river plan meets little favor
- ✓ March 3, 2017, Omaha World Herald Midland Voices article, Tom Bries: It's time the Legislature delivers property tax relief
- ✓ March 6, 2017, Omaha World Herald editorial: EPA needs to get water policy right
- ✓ March 8, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Some call for Sarpy County properties to be assessed at same level as Douglas County's

February 2017 Information/Education Report

Information

- Continued to update web site. Board of Directors page completed.
- Continued work on updates for Chalco Hills Visitors Center Exhibit
- Distributed news releases
- Responded to several requests for information/materials received through web site contacts
- Monitored local media coverage of NRD-related stories
- Began work on Spring, 2017 Spectrum Newsletter
- Completed preparations and staffed booth at 2017 Omaha Boat Sports and Travel show booth
- Promoted district-wide NDEQ/NRD 319 Water Quality Management Plan public meetings in Omaha and Blair
- Attended Sarpy County Economic Development Corp annual meeting and received award for NRD.
- Worked with Debra Ward, Burt County Field Office, to create one page display ad in Spring AgGuide Insert in Burt County Plaindealer Newspaper
- Began NARD coordination and planning on publishing new NRD Recreation Areas brochure

Education

February Programming Schedule:

2/2- St. Thomas Moore- Recycling- 2 programs- 46 students (K-2nd grade)
2/6- Parkview Heights Headstart- Recycling- 2 programs- 34 students (pre-K)
2/6- Mockingbird Elementary Nature Club- Adaptations
2/7- Chandler View Elementary- Reptiles - 4 programs- 85 students (3rd grade)
2/9- Crestridge Elementary- Environmental History- 2 programs- 38 students (5th grade)
2/10- Grandview Middle HALE- Snakes- 21 students
2/13- Elkhorn Ridge Middle- Environmental History- 19 students
2/15- Adams Elementary- Owls- 90 students (4th-5th grade)
2/16- Crestridge Elementary- Groundwater- 2 programs- 45 people (5th grade)
2/21- Walnut Creek Elementary- Recycle Relay- 2 programs- 41 students (pre-K)
2/22- Washington Elementary- Birds/Reptiles- 2 programs- 35 students
2/23- Wegner School EASE Club- Animal Adaptations-18 students (4th-8th grade)
2/24- Boat and Travel Show Booth
2/26- Boat and Travel Show Booth
2/28- Metro Regional Envirothon- 2 test times- 48 students (highschool)

Planning:

Updates/Monitoring of Papio-Missouri River NRD Facebook/Twitter/Google+/Instagram Sites and Web Pages
General NRD Animal Care
Outdoor Classroom Grants
Assist with Press Releases and Press Statements
Spring Program Planning
Regional Envirothon
Continued working with WBS to get another education owl/Filled out Transfer Paperwork with USFWS
Sponsorships of DU/WTF/PF banquets
NRD Summer Camp Registrations
Boat and Travel Show set up
SCEDC Award Presentation Write up
Prizes to FaceBook Contest Winners
Advertised Water Quality Open Houses

Meetings/Trainings:

Website training

ESU#3 Conference

Cottonwood Elementary Grants Meeting

Boat Show Meeting

February, 2017

[illegible]

Updated: February 13, 2017

Current and On-Going Projects P-MRNRD Legal Counsel

★ = Top Priority

F = Future Work – No Assignment

N = New Assignment

O = Others Handling

W = Work in Progress

P = Counsel Portion Completed

B = Next Board Meeting

- **Little Papio:** (Cleveland)
 - ★ Access licenses for stabilization projects (N)
- **Big Papio:** (Cleveland)
- **West Branch:** (Cleveland)
 - ★ Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (P)
- **Western Sarpy Dike:** (Cleveland/Petermann)
 - NRDs/NE-ARNG Interlocal for Camp Ashland Property (F)
- **Floodway Purchase Program:** (Laster/Grint)
 - Arlington Purchase Agreements, Deeds, etc. (F)
- **Trail Projects:** (Williams)
 - West Papio Trail, Giles to Millard – Potential Tyson Access License Agreement (F)
 - West Papio Trail, Giles to Millard – Qwest LLC License Agreement Potential Termination (P)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project:** (Becic)
 - California Bend Trail Interlocal Agreement with City of Blair (N)

- **USDA PL 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed:** (Schumacher/Cleveland)
 - ⊛ Papio W-3 Eminent Domain (Camden) Settlement Agreement (W)
 - Papio PL 566 Site W-2 Issues (F)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites:** (Grint/Laster/Williams)
 - ⊛ ROW Acquisition Documents for WP6 & WP7 (F)
 - ⊛ Transfer Deed to City of Omaha for Zorinsky Basin 1 (P)
 - ⊛ City of Omaha Interlocal Agreement for ZB-2 (W)
 - ⊛ WP6 & WP7 Interlocal Agreement with Papillion and Sarpy Co. (W)
 - ⊛ Purchase Agreements and ROW Documents for Z-B2 (B)
 - ⊛ City of Omaha Interlocal Agreement Amendment No. 2 for DS-15A (W)
 - ⊛ Purchase Agreements with Celebrity Homes for WP1 and WP4 (B)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater):** (Grint)
- **Southern Sarpy Watershed Partnership (Stormwater):** (Laster)
 - ⊛ Interlocal with City of Omaha for Construction Inspections (N)
- **Missouri River R-613 and R-616 Levees:** (Cleveland/Woodward)
 - Offutt AFB Culvert O&M Agreement (W)
 - ⊛ ROW Acquisition Documents (W)
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Nelson)
 - ⊛ WCRW Eriksen Construction Contract Change Order, greater than 10% (B)
- **Other:**
 - ⊛ Lower Platte River Basin Coalition Interlocal Agreement Amendment (W) (Woodward)
 - ⊛ NRC Tower Renovation Bid Documents/Agreements (N) (Petermann)
 - ⊛ ENWRA Geo Cloud Program Interlocal Agreements (B)
 - ⊛ Papio Watershed Hydraulics Update Professional Services Contract with Stantec (B)

Flood resolution finally nearing completion

- By Hillary Rosencrants/features@enterprisepub.com/2-10-17



Some houses adjacent to this unnamed creek — actually a drainage ditch often referred to as "South Creek" — were designated in the floodplain or floodway after FEMA remapped flood areas in 2012.

It's been almost six years since the 2011 Missouri River flood affected not only Washington County, but several counties in the area.

Due to Washington County's participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), there are a number of criteria that must be met by the county in order for flood insurance to be retained.

In 2012, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) conducted a Community Assistance Visit (CAV) to determine the effectiveness of Washington County's floodplain management program, and to resolve any subsequent issues.

"There were a few things in that code that needed to reflect minimum federal and state standards," said Shandi Teltschik, a natural hazards program specialist with FEMA who specifically works with Nebraska. "The county acted very quickly in getting that corrected and up-to-date."

The issues that a CAV looks into typically have to evaluate damaged properties and determine what needs to be rebuilt, as well as what needs to be brought up to current standards. Nebraska has a statewide floodplain law that states that no new residential structures can be built in a floodway.

"If you have a substantially damaged structure in the floodway in Nebraska, it really cannot be rebuilt because of that higher standard of no new residential structures," Teltschik said. "So I think the county did a good job of explaining that to people so there could be understanding of how the county might move forward and recover."

In the past, there have been many issues with the amount of work being piled on officials in Washington County. At the beginning of 2013, the county received a letter detailing both "substantive program deficiencies" and "possible violations" identified during the CAV.

However, Teltschik has worked closely with former Washington County Planning and Zoning Administrator Tanna Wirtz as well as the current administrator, Ryan Sullivan, to resolve any issues since she took over the Kansas City FEMA office in early 2013.

"We are very close with Washington County in wrapping up the CAV, and being able to close that, which is our standard process," Teltschik said. "We look at the development, we identify any issues, then we work with the community to determine any kind of compliance actions, and then the community will work through those."

Sullivan said he hopes the CAV will be fully completed by spring.

"That would be nice," Sullivan said. "I mean, it's an ongoing thing that you just have to monitor."

Sullivan said the remaining issues have to do with Flood Based Elevation Certificates, which tell FEMA whether or not the lowest floor of a residence is above the flood level.

While it has taken several years for all of the compliance items to be resolved, Teltschik says that's not uncommon. Smaller communities that have less real estate development actively occurring will often be able to streamline this process in a matter of months. However, that's not the case with Washington County.

"A larger community that's in the program like Washington County that does have a lot of development going on and has a lot of desirable real estate — it can definitely take a while," Teltschik said.

Teltschik said Washington County has two outstanding issues remaining. Sullivan's job is to provide FEMA with updates on the progress of the county's compliance with NFIP standards.

"We just need some additional info on those issues," Teltschik said. "I know that Ryan (Sullivan) is working through those when I last checked in on him before Christmas. When he gets that information to us, we'll send out a letter saying thank you for providing that, and that we consider this CAV closed."

Evacuations ordered over concerns at California dam system

CNN.com/2-13-17



The dam, which is the nation's tallest, remains intact. But the emergency spillway, which guards against the overflow of the dam when water levels are high, was eroding Sunday.

The damage prompted a mandatory evacuation for cities and counties near Lake Oroville. In the worst case scenario, one official said, an uncontrolled release from the dam could send a 30-foot wall of water downstream.

"I'm not going to lift the evacuation order until I have a better idea of what that means and what risk that poses," Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea said in a news conference late Sunday night.

Officials are waiting until daylight Monday to better assess the situation and decide when it's safe for residents to return, Honea said.

California Gov. Jerry Brown issued a state emergency order to help local authorities with the situation and evacuations.

What led up to the emergency

Heavy rainfall in Northern California this winter has filled Lake Oroville to the verge of overflow. The lake also gets water from the northern Sierra Nevada mountain range, which is experiencing one of its wettest seasons. This has triggered concerns over whether the water could overflow the dam and flood nearby communities.

The Oroville Dam provides flood control for the region and is located about 75 miles north of Sacramento.

The dam has two spillways -- the primary and the emergency spillway -- which are channels to leak water out of the lake to prevent overflow. And right now, both have problems.

Last week, the primary spillway was damaged by erosion, according to the California Department of Water Resources. Images of the structure showed a massive hole in the lower part of the channel.

That hole can't be fixed at the moment. It's 250 feet long, 170 feet wide and about 40 to 50 feet deep, said Bill Croyle, acting director of the Department of Water Resources.

"You don't throw a little bit of rock in it," he said.

Of the two, the emergency spillway is a last resort. At Oroville Dam, the emergency spillway is only used if water levels reach 901 feet in elevation. It hasn't needed to be used in its 48-year history -- until this weekend.

Why evacuation order was made

A light flow of water began washing into the emergency spillway Saturday and the volume of water began to increase. Around 3 p.m. (6 p.m. ET) Sunday, authorities learned that the dam's emergency spillway was also eroding, Honea said.

The erosion of the emergency spillway is dangerous because "when you start to erode the ground, the dirt and everything else starts to roll off the hill," said Kevin Lawson, California Fire incident commander.

"It starts to undermine itself. If that is not addressed, if that's not mitigated properly, essentially what we're looking at, is approximately a 30-foot wall of water," he said.

Evacuation orders on Sunday sternly warned residents that the erosion could result in "large, uncontrolled releases of water from Lake Oroville."

Honea's office used the most urgent of language -- "This is NOT a drill" -- in ordering residents to evacuate ahead of an impending disaster. Residents were told that the emergency "spillway is close to failing." The evacuation order included "all Yuba County on the valley floor" and the city of Marysville, authorities said.

About 35,000 people from Butte County, 65,000 from Yuba County, 76,000 from Yuba City and 12,000 from Marysville City evacuated, according to California Fire.

Stores closed. Shelters opened. Local gas stations were swarmed with cars as residents tried to leave town. Evacuees waited in traffic trying to get out of low-lying areas.

Sean Dennis, who lives 30 miles south of Oroville, spoke to CNN from his car after spending 4.5 hours in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

"It was pretty scary, just because of how fast everything was developing," he said. "Me and my wife managed to throw as much of stuff as we could into garbage bags, whatever we could find. We got both of our cars loaded down pretty well. We're not taking any chances."

Police said that despite rumors, there were no reports of looting.

Watching the damage

After issuing the evacuation orders, authorities noted significant decreases in the water coming over the emergency spillway.

The flow of water on the emergency spillway eventually stopped Sunday night as the Department of Water Resources withdrew more water from the other spillway.

The main spillway is releasing water at 100,000 cubic feet per second in an effort to reduce the amount of water traveling down the emergency spillway, authorities said. Normal flows down the main spillway are about 55,000 cubic feet per second.

"The goal is to get the lake to drop 50 feet. If we can continue to do that, that brings a little bit of calm to what we're trying to accomplish here," said Cal Fire's Lawson.

So far, there have been no repairs made on the emergency spillway, because teams have been unable to reach the damaged area.

Teams will take a look and assess the situation Monday morning, Croyle said.

Authorities will have to act fast -- more rain is in the forecast for Wednesday.

Assessor will adjust controversial property tax valuations, but some homeowners will still see big increases

- By Christopher Burbach / World-Herald staff writer/2-15-17

Douglas County Assessor Diane Battiato will recalculate 2017 property tax valuations to lessen steep hikes, but some homeowners will still see large increases — and some County Board members aren't sold on her plan.

Battiato told the Douglas County Board on Tuesday that she will adjust residential property valuations so the county's total will be at 93 percent of market value. She said that will lessen the burden on taxpayers while keeping the county in compliance with state tax law.

But it doesn't mean that the proposed large increases in property valuations — sometimes double or more — will go away. The increases will just be smaller.

For example, the valuations in large sections of west Omaha and Douglas County suburbs would have gone up by more than 21 percent under the preliminary valuations. They would go up a combined 13 to 14 percent under the plan Battiato announced Tuesday.

Homeowners in other parts of town would generally see smaller increases.

She said she will start with the preliminary 2017 valuations her office set in January.

She'll reduce those valuations by a percentage, which will differ from neighborhood to neighborhood, depending on sales trends in those neighborhoods, she said.

"Under the circumstances, this was the best option to meet state standards and lessen the severity of the increases," Battiato said.

People who believe their valuations are wrong can protest them in June.

Battiato must send final valuations to the state by March 25. She said she will take the unusual step of posting the 2017 valuations on her website March 25. Notices are mailed to taxpayers in May.

Her plan to recalculate the valuations received a lukewarm reception from the County Board on Tuesday.

"This is a step in the right direction," board member Clare Duda told Battiato. "Thank you for working with us."

He said he realized the valuations could lead to painful tax increases, but the Assessor's Office is required to follow state law. The state requires counties to set valuations at 92 to 100 percent of market value and to equalize the valuations between taxpayers.

Board member P.J. Morgan said he has received numerous calls and emails about what he and taxpayers consider inaccurate and inconsistent valuations. He took to the public microphone Tuesday to detail several of what he considered egregious examples.

"I am as passionate about this as I've ever been in politics because I feel so bad for our citizens," Morgan said.

Battiato said she could not address individual properties. She said her office has adjusted some valuations after taxpayers provided information the office didn't have.

Battiato has generally defended the valuations as accurate. She has said they were caused by a rising real estate market and what she said were years of some properties being undervalued.

County Board Chair Mary Ann Borgeson is not convinced that's right, or that Battiato's solution is the right one.

"I really am not sold on any solution, because I have heard from so many people about so many inaccuracies and inconsistencies," Borgeson said. "I just don't trust the data. ... We will probably have one heck of a Board of Equalization protest period (in June) this year. As we should."

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Douglas County valuation hikes raise concerns in Sarpy

- By Emily Nitcher / World-Herald staff writer

2-15-17

Controversy over property tax valuations in neighboring Douglas County has Sarpy County officials questioning the valuations in their own backyard.

At Tuesday's Sarpy County Board meeting, members questioned whether the county could adjust residential property valuations to get closer to those in Douglas County. Sarpy County property is assessed at 96 percent of market value.

Douglas County Assessor Diane Battiato said Tuesday that in the wake of steep preliminary increases that have shocked some homeowners, she will adjust 2017 property tax valuations so the county's total will be at 93 percent of market value.

That prompted questions from all five Sarpy County Board members, who want to know why the two counties aren't aiming for the same target.

Board member Jim Warren pointed to a letter that Ruth Sorensen, administrator of the Property Assessment Division in the Nebraska Department of Revenue, sent to Douglas County. That letter noted that state law requires county assessors to set property valuations at 92 to 100 percent of market value.

The letter let Douglas County know it could reduce valuations and still comply with state law because the 2017 preliminary valuations put the county at 99 percent of actual value.

"My personal opinion on this matter is that if 92 percent wasn't good enough it wouldn't be the minimum," said Don Kelly, chairman of the Sarpy County Board. He said he'd like to see values in Sarpy County sit at 92 percent.

Kelly said he's concerned because there are several political subdivisions such as the Learning Community and Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District that collect taxes from both counties. He questioned why taxpayers in Sarpy County should be paying a greater share into those political subdivisions.

Board member Brian Zuger said he has been hearing from constituents wondering if the same increases that have happened in Douglas County could happen in Sarpy County. With Sarpy County looking at valuations on a yearly basis, instead of waiting years between adjustments, Zuger said he's been able to tell them that it's unlikely. But he still said it would be a good idea to at least look at valuing properties closer to 92 or 93 percent of market value.

Sarpy County Assessor Dan Pittman noted that the 96 percent target is in the middle of the range of potential valuations.

"An assessor seeks a middle of the range because they're in jeopardy if they're at the high end or the low end," Pittman said. "They're in jeopardy of having the state file their abstract, run their statistics and say you have market areas out of compliance."

Last year, Douglas County had market areas out of compliance, prompting the state's Tax Equalization Review Commission to mandate across-the-board increases in some parts of the county and reductions in other areas.

Kelly said the County Board will revisit the issue in a few weeks.

http://www.omaha.com/news/metro/douglas-county-valuation-hikes-raise-concerns-in-sarpy/article_038d7587-42a7-5128-ac7e-a4222703e7fc.html

Omaha declines to back bill on riverfront projects

- By Martha Stoddard / World-Herald Bureau/2-15-17

LINCOLN — The City of Omaha took a stand Tuesday against a bill originally designed to help the city realize its riverfront development dreams.

Cassie Paben, Mayor Jean Stothert's deputy chief of staff for economic development, said city officials have too many technical concerns about Legislative Bill 97 to support it.

She also said there are other development tools available to help Omaha draw businesses, activities and people to the Missouri River.

"We feel pretty confident in our ability to do the riverfront development project without this," Paben said at a legislative hearing.

But some other Nebraska communities that front rivers had no problem backing the bill introduced by State Sen. Sue Crawford of Bellevue.

Norfolk, Plattsmouth, Bellevue, Beatrice and South Sioux City all supported the measure.

Norfolk Mayor Josh Moenning told the Urban Affairs Committee that LB 97 could be useful for efforts to redevelop areas along the North Fork of the Elkhorn River, which runs through the northeast Nebraska city.

Community leaders want to develop housing, business and recreational areas along the waterfront.

The bill would allow cities to create riverfront development districts, which could extend up to half a mile from the edge of a river.

New entities, called riverfront development authorities, could coordinate and facilitate development efforts within the designated riverfront area.

The new entities would have many of the same abilities as business development districts. They could issue bonds and fund projects with occupation taxes on businesses or special assessments on property in the riverfront district.

Crawford said there are 52 Nebraska communities that could potentially use the proposed mechanism. Each city could make its own decision whether to do so.

"It's only something a city would do if there was the political will," she said. "If the City of Omaha has other plans in place, nothing forces them to use this."

Paben said Omaha may be interested in using the proposed tool if the city's concerns can be addressed.

She said the city raised the same concerns about last year's bill, which was introduced by then-Sen. Heath Mello of Omaha. The city testified neutral on that previous bill.

Mello now is running against Stothert for mayor.

Among the city's concerns, Paben said, were the possibility of tax increases, the uses of tax-exempt bonds and the process for handling liabilities if the district were dissolved.

She said amendments made to last year's proposal, which are incorporated into LB 97, did not do enough to address those concerns.

The Urban Affairs Committee, however, advanced the bill on a 5-0 vote following Tuesday's hearing.

Sen. Justin Wayne of Omaha, the committee chairman, said Omaha's concerns could be handled through the local ordinance that would be required to create a riverfront development district.

"I think our job as legislators is to give communities as many tools as we can for development," he said.

Omaha business and community leaders, working in collaboration with Council Bluffs, have undertaken a major push to redevelop the riverfront in recent years.

Experts from the Urban Land Institute laid out a vision for the area in 2014 that calls for more riverfront events, along with more trails, better access and more open space.

In support of that vision, the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce created the Missouri River Commons initiative and hired a full-time director. She started this week.

At the same time, business leaders have formed a committee to pursue development ideas for the riverfront.

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Agency sees economic growth throughout Sarpy County

- By Eugene Curtin / Leader Associate Editor/2-15-17



- Photo by Eugene Curtin

Bellevue Mayor Rita Sanders and Emmett Egr of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District display their economic development awards Thursday night. The awards were conferred upon the two officials by the Sarpy County Economic Development Corporation during the SCEDC's annual convention held at the Beardmore Event Center of Bellevue. Jered Morris, president of the SCEDC is at left, with Andrew Rainbolt, SCEDC executive director, at right.

Several hundred leaders of government and business flocked Thursday night to the Beardmore Event Center of Bellevue to hear a presentation concerning the economic health of Sarpy County.

The event was the annual meeting of the Sarpy County Economic Development Corporation, and the conclusion after a 60-minute presentation was that Sarpy County is growing in almost all respects at a steady and healthy rate.

James Caraway, SCEDC business development manager, said the county is sustaining steady population growth, having grown by almost 17,000 residents between the 2010 U.S. Census and preliminary census estimates released in 2015. He said the county's current estimated population of just more than 170,000 represents growth of about 3,000 residents a year.

Of Sarpy County's five cities, Caraway said Bellevue leads the way in population growth, having gained an estimated 5,000 residents between 2010 and 2015.

The City of Papillion, however, leads the way in household income, with its median figure settling at \$20,000 above the median statewide household income of \$51,381. Papillion is not alone in exceeding the statewide median household income.

Caraway said the countywide median household income is \$17,000 above the state median.

The U.S. median household income is \$53,889, he said.

Although fourth-quarter figures for taxable sales have not yet been released by the State of Nebraska, Caraway said the county is likely to set a record, as it has every year since 2010.

Home-building is also recovering from recession levels, he said, with the county and the cities consistently approving about 900 new units a year, a pace he described as "robust."

Caraway presented a lengthy list of major projects across the county that were either underway or completed in 2016. Those included The Cloisters on the Platte, a religious retreat being developed

by Ameritrade founder Joe Ricketts, the Oxbow Animal Health Operations Facility at 150th and Schram Road, the Omaha Trucking Center complex off Highway 50 across from the Werner Trucking headquarters, and the doubling of the Blue Buffalo pet food distribution center in Bellevue.

To those he added the Costco store in LaVista, the Corwin Toyota car dealership and the west campus of St. James United Methodist Church, both in Bellevue, elementary schools in Westmont and Gretna, and the Volleyball Academy, a 50,000-square-foot, eight-court complex at 120th Street and Portal Road.

Caraway's presentation gave way to Andrew Rainbolt, executive director of the SCEDC. Rainbolt said Sarpy County is seeing healthy growth in warehousing, but that overall business inquiries are down.

Manufacturing inquiries were down in 2016, he said, with inquiries from the service industry down more than half when compared to 2015. Data center inquiries are also down, he said, though those that are considering Sarpy County tend to be very large.

Rainbolt said he considers Sarpy County's project pipeline — projects being pursued — to be "strong," and that the SCEDC is currently working on 18 quality prospects that include insurance and finance companies.

Capital investment goals are being met, Rainbolt said.

He said the SCEDC set a goal of \$600 million in capital investment during the two-year period, 2016-2017.

He said \$313 million of that figure was realized in 2016, with \$218 million of that stemming from expansion conducted by businesses already present in Sarpy County.

"We never take our eyes off those businesses that are already here and poised for growth," he said.

Employment goals are also being met, Rainbolt said.

He said a goal of creating 900 jobs paying at or above the median wage during the 2016-2017 period is progressing well.

During 2016, Rainbolt said 674 new jobs were created in Sarpy County, 332 from new companies. How many of those were at or above the median wage level is not yet known, he said.

As always, Rainbolt said, the annual \$1.3 billion impact of Offutt Air Force Base on the greater Omaha economy cannot be overstated. The new runway at the base, in addition to ongoing construction of the new U.S. Strategic Command headquarters, are just the latest examples of that impact, he said.

"Not every community gets to have a \$180 million infusion of capital investment year after year," he said.

Finally, Rainbolt said, the SCEDC is working to create job-ready or "Go Ready" sites.

Two such Power Park sites have been established along the Highway 50 corridor, with another site being developed at the southwest corner of Highway 50 and Platteview Road, he said.

The SCEDC is also working with the City of Bellevue, he said, to make shovel-ready a city-owned site along Cunningham Road off Harlan Lewis Road.

"It does feel like things are moving in the right direction there," he said. "Slowly, but surely."

Two projects reach final approval

Tiger Trail Loop project/February 17, 2017/Burt County Plaindealer



The engineering designs for the Tekamah Master Trail Plan and the West P Street project both received unanimous approval from the Tekamah City Council Thursday night.

Both design drawings were presented by Julie Ogden with JEO, the municipal engineers for the city.

Bonnie Chatt and Linda Shada, members of the Tekamah Trail Committee, were on hand to support the master plan. (See drawings on page 3.) Chatt and Shada explained that only the Tiger Trail is being targeted for construction in the first phase.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission granted \$250,000 from federal funds, the majority of the money needed for the Tiger Loop. Additional funding of \$36,410 will be requested in March from the Papio Missouri Natural Resources District. Those grants will be awarded in April. There is no guarantee Tekamah will be chosen by the NRD but the committee is optimistic.

Local sources must still fund the remaining \$38,000. Organizers plan to seek designation from the Community Development Assistance Act so local contributors will qualify for a 40 percent tax credit. With the Tiger Loop running in and near the ball park complex, there will also be a request made for tax credits on behalf of the Tekamah Ball Association. Donations toward a new concession stand would also qualify for the tax credit.

The City of Tekamah previously budgeted \$40,000 for the trail. \$5,000 has been spent from local keno funds to cover initial feasibility and engineering costs. Successful local fundraising would make additional spending by the city unnecessary.

The 40 percent tax credit program was successfully utilized for the recent Lied Tekamah Public Library expansion project.

Shada urged passage of the master plan and said by taking action 'the council can demonstrate that the city is behind the project when we ask for donations.'

Construction goals for the Tiger Loop are being set for 2018.

Ogden also presented final plans for the P Street project. It calls for P St. to be widened and straightened at the west edge of the city. The intersection of P and Cemetery Road also will be redone.

The council took action to ratify previous actions approving the plans and specifications. Notice to contractors has taken place and the construction contract was award to Robert Woehler & Sons Construction of Wayne, Neb.

The accepted bid was for \$442,200. The project was previously placed in the budget for \$450,000 after an estimate was determined to be \$425,000. The bid includes paving, sewer and water main improvements. The project is set to begin about June 1 so access to the Tekamah Cemetery will not be interrupted during Memorial Day weekend. Construction time is estimated to be two and a half months.

Omaha, Papio-Missouri River NRD to host meeting on water pollution

- By Jay Withrow / World-Herald staff writer

- Feb 18, 2017

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and City of Omaha officials will host an open house meeting Feb. 27 on reducing water pollution in Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The open house will be held at the Papio-Missouri River NRD headquarters at Chalco Hills Recreation Area, 8901 S. 154th St., from 5 to 6 p.m.

Officials said the meeting's focus will be "nonpoint source pollution," which is caused by rainfall or snowmelt carrying natural and manmade pollutants into lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands.

NRD official: Oroville Dam situation unlikely to happen in Omaha area

- By Jay Withrow / World-Herald staff writer

2-20-17

Chances are very slim that the recent near-disaster situation at Northern California's Lake Oroville Dam could occur at an Omaha-area dam, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District said.

John Winkler, Papio-Missouri River NRD general manager, said the NRD works with state and federal agencies so that all of its structures meet dam-safety requirements.

The NRD performs a spillway integrity analysis on every dam it designs and builds as required by the State of Nebraska, he said. And NRD maintenance crews also regularly inspect the dams and make repairs quickly.

The earthen spillway at Dam Site 15A, under construction at 168th and Fort Streets, is designed to handle flows up to 30,000 cubic feet per second, Winkler said. That is almost twice the amount of water released over the emergency spillway at the Oroville Dam.

Winkler said that NRD dams are 90 percent smaller than the Oroville Dam, which is the tallest dam in the U.S., at 770 feet. By comparison, Dam Site 15A is 50 feet tall, he said.

Operators of the dam in California's Sierra Nevada foothills became alarmed that the water cascading from the reservoir after winter storms could roar uncontrolled down an eroding emergency spillway toward towns downstream. They ordered 188,000 downstream residents to evacuate.

The evacuation order was later eased, allowing people to return to the 16,000-resident town of Oroville and other downstream towns.

An NRD spokesman said that the organization had received a few calls and comments about the matter in Oroville and how it compared with the Omaha area's situation.

Corps' river plan meets little favor

Mark Jackson/Burt County Plaindealer

February 22, 2017

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wanted public comment and they got it.

The Corps is seeking comment for its draft Missouri River Recovery Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. It hosted a string of public meetings all along the river recently, including a Feb. 14 date in Omaha.

About 75 attended the meeting, held at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, but none of the half-dozen who offered public comment favored the Corps' preferred alternative.

Labeled as Alternative 3, it calls for spending over \$100 million per year, over \$3.1 billion total, to create more favorable habitat for three endangered species, the pallid sturgeon, piping plover and the interior least tern.

Alternative 3 is neither the least expensive nor the most invasive of the six plans.

For example, Alternative 2 follows the biological opinion of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It calls for \$15.7 billion in spending and adapting the river flow from Gavin's Point Dam to replicate the river's natural action-with flows higher in the spring and lower in the summer.

Alternative 2 was the choice preferred by those who want to better connect the river to the surrounding ecosystem. Jim Becic, who works on river restoration projects for the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, said he wasn't speaking for the NRD during his remarks. Still, he called Alternative 3 'wholly inadequate,' and asked for a plan that called for the acquisition of additional riverside acreage to craft a more broader solution that would benefit all species.

Marian Maas, a retired biologist, called Alternative 3 the least sustainable of any of the plans because all of the habitat restoration is mechanically created. She said since the process is intended to benefit wildlife, 'the Fish and Wildlife Service should provide the prescription, not the Corps.'

Nearly everyone else spoke against the proposal because of what it does to the property and business owners along the river.

Bill Beacom, a retired towboat captain from Sioux City, said the problem 'goes back several generals,' and that the Corps's process only decides a method for a course of action that's already been chosen.

'The fewest oxes get gored in Alternative 3, but there isn't any money for any of it,' he said. 'It would behoove the Fish and Wildlife Service to give the Corps a problem they can solve.'

Tom Brieese: It's time the Legislature delivers property tax relief

Property tax relief should be a two-pronged approach composed of this rebalancing, coupled with spending restraints. It requires us to be diligent in spending Nebraskans' hard-earned tax dollars.

- Midlands Voices/3-3-17

The writer is a Nebraska state senator from Albion.

It's little wonder Nebraskans are demanding property tax relief.

USA Today ranks Nebraska as the fifth-worst state for property taxes. According to the Tax Foundation, Nebraska homeowners have the seventh-highest property taxes in the nation. Nebraska is second in the percentage of K-12 education funded by property taxes. Approximately 49 percent of our school funding comes from property taxes, while the national average is only 29 percent.

According to Nebraska Farm Bureau, Nebraskans pay roughly 2.5 times more in property taxes than in state sales taxes. If we include local sales taxes, U.S. Census Bureau data suggests Nebraskans pay 56 percent more in property taxes than in sales taxes. Census Bureau data also indicates we pay 36 percent more in sales taxes than in state individual and corporate income taxes combined.

Our state relies much too heavily on property taxes, and it's time our elected officials stand with Nebraskans and heed the call for relief. Surveys show widespread support for property tax reform by replacing property tax revenue with other revenue sources — support from one end of the state to the other.

That's why I've introduced legislation to address the imbalance in our tax structure. My two bills provide an opportunity to show Nebraskans that their elected leaders are serious about providing meaningful property tax relief.

Legislative Bill 313 would raise sales tax revenue by increasing the rate. Legislative Bill 312 would expand the sales tax base to include more goods and services which have otherwise been excluded from our sales tax base.

LB 312 targets a broad swath of consumer transactions to provide a base expansion driven by principles of fairness and consistency and not by special interests.

Both bills provide for diverting a portion of the revenue raised to reimburse the less fortunate among us for their additional sales tax outlays, with the balance remitted into a newly created property tax credit fund to be distributed to all owners of real property.

But property tax relief is about more than just changing our tax structure. In fact, property tax relief should be a two-pronged approach composed of this rebalancing, coupled with spending restraints. It requires us to be diligent in spending Nebraskans' hard-earned tax dollars.

However, as we attempt to control spending, we must recognize that Nebraskans expect a certain level of services locally, and that expectation must be met.

We must especially never forget the importance of a high-quality K-12 system to the future of our state. The bottom line is that spending reductions alone will not provide the property tax relief our residents are demanding.

Other ideas will be floated in the name of property tax relief, including addressing our school state aid formula. And this formula certainly needs revisiting.

Others may want to examine how we fund our community colleges, natural resources districts and county and city services, or perhaps look at how we value certain classes of property. These, too, are worthy of discussion. But these conversations, in the absence of raising the revenue to fund some of these changes, will not produce the property tax relief all Nebraskans deserve.

There are only two routes to property tax relief. One is to find ways to reduce spending. The other is to change how we pay for things.

My legislative bills are a straightforward attempt to alter our funding structure to provide fairness and balance to our taxpayers. At the same time, we must strive for spending restraints and continue to look at other options. But any effort for immediate and substantial property tax relief must include the rebalancing I have proposed. Anything short of this is a recipe for failure.

Nebraskans need property tax relief, and they need it now. LB 312 and LB 313 provide an opportunity for the leaders of our state to stand with Nebraskans and deliver the property tax relief they deserve.

Editorial: EPA needs to get water policy right

- World-Herald editorial/3-6-17

The Trump administration's overturning of the so-called "waters of the United States" environmental regulations last week was an act of responsible governance, not radicalism.

What was radical was the Environmental Protection Agency's excessive regulatory claims to begin with.

The U.S. Supreme Court has told the EPA not once but twice, in 2001 and 2006, that the agency exceeded its regulatory authority in separate, significant water-policy cases.

Rather than heed the court's admonitions to demonstrate proper restraint, however, the EPA proceeded to develop the expansive "waters of the U.S." rules. The action raised justified concern that the agency once again was claiming enforcement powers beyond its legal authority.

Two federal courts — a U.S. district judge in North Dakota and a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals in Cincinnati — put the rules on hold. Twenty-nine states filed legal action against the rules. And majorities in both houses of Congress voted in favor of legislation directing the EPA to step back and revamp the regulations.

Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, rightly termed the "waters of the U.S." initiative "the ultimate power grab by the EPA."

Ag producers in the Midlands were outspoken in expressing concern about economic harm posed by the rules, since farmers and ranchers would be required for the first time to get federal permits for a range of activities. The permitting process would add delays and increase costs.

The feds' regulatory reach would have extended for the first time to include putting in or changing drainage ditches; installing small dams and terracing; applying fertilizer, pesticides and manure; and using stock ponds for watering animals.

There unquestionably is a need for environmental regulation in a modern society. The point, though, is how far government's enforcement authority extends under the law — in this instance, the Clean Water Act.

The Trump executive order ending the "waters of the U.S." rules means that the process for drawing up regulations on these water-related issues will start anew. The public will have considerable opportunities for input.

This time, the EPA needs to get it right, keeping its authority within proper bounds — just as the Supreme Court has urged and the EPA, till now, has ignored.

Some call for Sarpy County properties to be assessed at same level as Douglas County's

- By Emily Nitcher / World-Herald staff writer / March 8, 2017

- It's a matter of equalization for Sarpy County Board members.

As controversy over property valuations continues in Douglas County, board members in neighboring Sarpy County have questioned why the two are not assessed the same.

On Tuesday, board members revisited the idea of adjusting property valuations to match the level of those in Douglas County. But officials from cities, school districts and sanitary improvement districts were quick to point out that those adjustments would come at a cost.

The Sarpy County assessor has said that he aims for property to be assessed at 96 percent of market value. Douglas County Assessor Diane Battiatto is working on a plan to reduce large valuation hikes that shocked homeowners so the county's total will be at 93 percent of market value.

Sarpy County was considering crafting a nonbinding resolution to ask Sarpy County Assessor Dan Pittman to match the 93 percent level.

Board member Brian Zuger said he's heard from homeowners, especially along the Sarpy County side of Harrison Street. No homeowners spoke at the meeting.

There are four school districts within Zuger's Bellevue district, including the Omaha Public Schools. With property valued at different levels in the counties, a homeowner on the Sarpy County side of Harrison Street could be paying more to OPS than someone with a home worth the same on the Douglas County side.

Board member Don Kelly said that's not fair. And Kelly pointed out other entities that cross the county line, including the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and Learning Community.

"Is it fair to Sarpy County residents to be paying more into the different political subdivisions or districts that we have here?" asked board member Gary Mixan.

Andy Rikli, superintendent of Papillion-La Vista Community Schools, told the board that school districts have the most to lose or gain when discussing property valuations. Rikli's district, the fourth largest in the state, would lose about \$2.2 million per year if Sarpy County valuations went from 96 percent to 92 percent.

Bellevue City Administrator Joe Mangiamelli said adjusting valuations would cost his city from \$500,000 to \$700,000. Bellevue has an aging sewer system and streets that need repairs, he said.

After the meeting, Sarpy County board members said they didn't plan to move forward with a resolution but would instead look at forming a committee to ask the state for action.

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