

3. The District received correspondence from Bitco Insurance regarding a field operations survey along Thompson Creek. The focus of the survey was to determine hazards regarding working around construction equipment, falls off equipment, construction equipment traffic patterns, and other general liability exposures. Special thanks to Pat McEvoy for his time during this survey. The District has also been notified that it has been designated as one of the “Safest Companies in the Greater Omaha Area!” The District will be recognized with the Award of Distinction, at the Greater Omaha Chapter, National Safety Council Awards Luncheon on May 24, 2017. All P-MRNRD employees are to be commended for this honor. **I would like to acknowledge the work of our Safety Coordinator, Nicole Gust, and the members of the P-MRNRD Safety Committee: Michael Grube, Austin Hill, Lori Laster, Pat McEvoy, DJ Rees, Terry Schumacher and Deb Ward.**

4. Omaha Magazine – Family Guide has published an “exemplary educator” article on the District’s Environmental Education Program, entitled “Austen Hill, Wild about Teaching Kids to be Wild”. Austen has been with the District for seven years and continues to do an excellent job in teaching environmental education that reach children from pre-elementary through high school. Great job Austen!

5. The District has received correspondence from Olsson Associates regarding an update to their contract for the Groundwater Management Plan and FYRA Engineering regarding the Missouri River Federal Levee Systems R-613/R-616 Fee Status. Their letters are attached for your review.

C. **REPORT ON PURCHASES – CONSTRUCTION SERVICES, PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AND PERSONAL PROPERTY:** Pursuant to Board direction, the report indicating construction services, professional services and personal property purchases from the month of March 2017, is attached for your review. Please review this report and contact me if you have any questions.

D. **CURRENT AND ON-GOING PROJECTS – P-MRNRD LEGAL COUNSEL:** A copy of current and on-going projects for District Legal Counsel, Husch Blackwell, as of March 13, 2017, is attached for your review. I would ask each Director to review this report. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

E. **PAPILLION CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP REPORT:** The Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership Subcommittee meeting scheduled for March 23, 2017, was cancelled. The next Partnership meeting is scheduled for April 27, 2017.

F. **NEWS CLIPS:**

- ✓ March 13, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, UNO seeks funds for Missouri River research station, including 90-foot observation tower
- ✓ March 13, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Papio-Missouri NRD approves draft of groundwater management plan
- ✓ March 15, 2017, Bellevue Leader article, Levee demands frustrating officials
- ✓ March 15, 2017, Bellevue Leader article, Making the Grade
- ✓ March 23, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Nebraska lawmakers hear testimony on bill to ban local governments from hiring lobbyists with tax money
- ✓ March 30, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Omaha City Council approves development package for ‘visionary’ \$1.2 billion project near Boys Town
- ✓ April 3, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Pleasant season may spring from early rain in Omaha metro area
- ✓ April 3, 2017, Associated Press article, Army Corps of Engineers brought to court over complaints about 2011 Missouri River flooding
- ✓ April 10, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Sarpy County says its residents pay more property taxes than Douglas County’s, asks state to step in
- ✓ April 10, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Lincoln bike-share program gears up for fall start
- ✓ April 12, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Sarpy County says sewer funding plan is necessary for development
- ✓ April 13, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Scott Bovick, Dan Hoins picked as Sarpy County administrator finalists

## **March 2017 Information/Education Report**

### **Information**

- Continued to update web site.
- Completed design work for updates of Chalco Hills Visitors Center Exhibit
- Ordered production of Visitors Center updates
- Distributed news releases
- Responded to several requests for information/materials received through web site contacts
- Monitored local media coverage of NRD-related stories
- Continued work on Spring, 2017 Spectrum Newsletter
- Continued planning for 2017 Home Show booth
- Began work on FY 2018 budget recommendations
- Began deletion of unneeded I&E files and folders
- Coordinated NRD sponsorship of upcoming special events

### **Education March Programming Schedule:**

**3/6-** Mockingbird Elementary Nature Club- Owls- 16 students (K-5<sup>th</sup> grade)  
**3/6-** Elkhorn Ridge Middle- Owls- 17 students  
**3/6-** Library Program-Amphibians- 65 preschoolers/parents  
**3/7-** Adams Elementary- Tracks, Pelts, Skulls- 2 programs- 48 students (4<sup>th</sup> grade)  
**3/8-** Millard West High- Animals - 5 programs- 85 students  
**3/9-** Tara Heights Elementary- Insects- 2 programs- 38 students (5<sup>th</sup> grade)  
**3/9-** Sandoz Elementary Nature Club- Nature Journal- 36 students (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade)  
**3/11-** Heron Haven- Camouflage- 39 people  
**3/13-** Ralston Middle- Adaptations- 7 programs- 115 students  
**3/14-** Premier Academy- Animals- 45 people  
**3/16-** Sandoz Elementary Nature Club- Amphibians- 26 students (k-2<sup>nd</sup> grade)  
**3/21-3/22-** Earth Wellness Festival, Lincoln, NE- "Turtle Talk"- 6 programs- 129 students (5<sup>th</sup> grade)  
**3/23-** Christ the King- Animals- 2 programs- 45 students (K)  
**3/23-** Sunset Hills Boy Scouts- Lizards- 18 scouts  
**3/24-** Benson West Elementary- Lizards, Turtles, Snakes- 2 programs- 46 students (1<sup>st</sup> grade)  
**3/28-** Adams Elementary- Erosion/Groundwater- 2 programs- 39 people (4<sup>th</sup> grade)  
**3/29-** Mary Our Queen- Adaptations- 3 programs- 58 students (3<sup>rd</sup> grade)  
**3/30-** La Vista Library- Macroinvertebrates- 30 people  
**3/31-** St. Bernadette- Environmental History- 26 students (4<sup>th</sup> grade)

### **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  
Transferred ESO to NRD from WBS  
NRD Summer Camp Registrations  
Advertised Water Quality Open Houses  
State Envirothon Wildlife Test edit  
State Envirothon Aquatics Test edit  
Updated Trails page, Post/Remove Job Opportunities on Web Site  
Water Works; Selection, Correspondence to schools, Update Schedule, Recruit presenters  
Envirothon Grants  
Tree Bags/Tags and Planning with Halsey on Tree Order

### **Meetings/Trainings:**

Video training  
World O! Water Meeting



# BITCO INSURANCE COMPANIES

AGENT COPY

Eric C. Balcom, CSP  
14301 FNB Parkway, Ste. 217  
Linden Place  
Omaha, NE 68154-5299  
www.bitco.com

TEL: 402.952-0054  
CELL: 309.236.1114  
FAX: 402.614.5763  
EMAIL: eric.balcom@bitco.com



April 4, 2017

Jean Tait  
Papio Missouri River NRD  
8901 South 154th Street  
Omaha, NE 68138

Dear Jean:

This letter confirms my visit to your Organization on 03/20/2017. The purpose of the time was to survey any active field operations around the Omaha NE area. This is part of BITCO Insurance Companies' Risk Control services toward its customers in assisting them in identifying and mitigating any loss potential directed against their Company.

I contacted Bill Warren, Construction Manager, who gave me information about the levee work along Thompson Creek in Sarpy County, NE. The focus of the survey was to determine any hazards regarding working around construction equipment, falls off equipment, construction equipment traffic patterns, and any general liability exposures.

As a consequence of the visit, no recommendations for improvement were generated.

Please thank Pat McElroy for his time on the job site.

I'm looking forward to my next visit which is scheduled for June 2017. I'll give you so that you can coordinate the visit for me. During that time, I'd like to continue surveying the field operations of the organization.

In the meantime, if any need arises that you think that BITCO Insurance could possibly meet, then please give me a call.

Sincerely,

*Eric C. Balcom*

Eric C. Balcom, CSP  
Senior Risk Control Consultant

cc: CMMLB, Inc.  
File #627354

This survey and this confirmation letter are limited exclusively to the items mentioned. It does not include every loss potential, nor violations of federal, state or local statutes, ordinances or regulations unless specifically designated herein.



March 23, 2017



**National Safety Council  
Nebraska**

Nicole Gust  
Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District  
8901 S 154 Street  
Omaha, NE 68138

Dear Nicole Gust,

Congratulations! Your company has been chosen as a National Safety Council, Nebraska Safest Company Award winner. You, your safety team, and the senior leadership are to be commended for your commitment to safety.

Safest Company Award applications are judged on the submitted safety logs and your company's safety programs. The company's previous three years of OSHA 300 safety log information is reviewed and scored using a weighted average, with the most recent year receiving the most weight. Your safety program score determines the level awarded - Safest Company or Safest Company with Distinction.

Safest Company award winners will be honored at the National Safety Council, Nebraska's Celebration of Safety Luncheon on Wednesday, May 24, 2017, at the Embassy Suites, LaVista Conference Center. Your invitation is forthcoming. We encourage the attendance of your senior management, safety team, and your partners who have shared in and supported this success. You may register in advance at our website: [www.SafeNebraska.org/2017Luncheon](http://www.SafeNebraska.org/2017Luncheon) on or before Friday, May 12, 2017.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to safety within your organization. We are looking forward to seeing you at the Celebration of Safety on May 24, 2017.

Please feel free to contact Kaitlin Moriarty at (402) 898-7364 if you need any additional information regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Beverly Reicks  
President/CEO

CC: CEO, John Winkler



ONE OF HIS FAVORITE PARTS ABOUT WORKING WITH KIDS IS TEACHING THEM ABOUT ANIMALS. HIS MENAGERIE AT PAPIO NRD INCLUDES NEARLY 30 REPTILES, AN OWL, AND AMPHIBIANS.

**A**USTEN HILL KNOWS that camping is an exciting, even vital, part of kids' summers. He does his part to make sure the Papio NRD camps stay exciting.

"I like to do different activities that they may not get to do every day," Hill says. "Many of the camps I've been to are kind of cookie-cutter in that they do the same activity each year, or each day."

Hill's camps include a variety of activities, and while the campers might see a snake each year, Hill makes sure to talk about different snakes so kids who may have come before learn something different.

It's an amazing idea, especially realizing that Hill is a one-man show. He coordinates everything from spring registration to summer counseling.

He uses Pinterest and other internet sites to find fresh ideas and learn new things himself. Of course, many of his ideas come from his own life experiences. Hill grew up in West Omaha, in an area that included a cornfield and a wooded area where he ran around as often as the weather permitted, fishing, hiking, and pursuing other activities.

It's that interest in the outdoors, and in learning new things, that drew him to this position at the NRD. While earning a degree in wildlife and fisheries, he thought he would pursue research as a career. A summer job at Fontenelle Forest showed him his true calling of education.

Now, Hill is the education assistant at Papio NRD. His school-year job is coordinating programs for students. He helped to produce 250

## WILD ABOUT TEACHING KIDS TO BE WILD

written by DAISY HUTZELL-RODMAN

photography by BILL SITZMANN

programs in 2016, working with schools four out of every five days during the academic year. Some schools come out for field trips to the NRD, while many other days Hill travels to schools.

"We've worked in a lot of inner-city classrooms," Hill says. "Not every school can be outside ... at least I can bring the environment to them."

One of his favorite parts about working with kids is teaching them about animals. His menagerie at Papio NRD includes nearly 30 reptiles, an owl, and amphibians. It is one of the kids' favorite parts as well.

"A lot of people talk about keeping kids' attention," Hill says. "I never have that problem."

Kristen Holzer, a zoology and biology teacher at Millard West High School who has worked with Hill at camps and at her school, concurs.

"It's amazing how much kids get excited," she says. "They love hearing about the animals. He'll let them handle them, so he passes around the snakes and things. Of course, the kids all get out their phones and take photos with them."

At least, they take photos during school visits. The camps involve a lot of old-fashioned fun ... spending time and energy hiking, kayaking, learning archery, and many other activities away from the often-ubiquitous screens.

"They can't have cell phones," Hill says. "We take those away first thing so the kids aren't tempted to look at their phones while we're doing other activities."

While many parents want their kids to be connected, Hill says he finds the parents of his campers often embrace the idea of unobstructed time in the woods. The kids are always supervised, and the exposure to the environment gives them a chance to learn and grow.

Hill himself is part of the reason why NRD camps and programs are fun.

"I think what makes it so cool is that he has the ability to relate to young kids and high school kids," Holzer says. "He has a really good skill set for his job. I enjoy working with him too."

That ability to relate allows him to help kids confront their fears, and learn new things themselves.

"Kids are fearful of everything," Hill says. "I'll have kids who are scared of a tiny bug that can't even fly. Then I'll show it to them, and they get first-hand experience, and they learn this is not something to be afraid of."

He also teaches environment classes, from tree planting to an annual Water Works field day for fifth-grade students. Papio-NRD also hosts the metro's Envirothon Competition, an annual environment-themed quiz competition by the National Conservation Foundation aimed at high school students.

Conversely, his perspective becomes refreshed thanks to the kids.

"We get dull to things," Hill says. "We step right over earthworms. Sometimes it takes a four-year-old to get awed by earthworms. That's a good feeling." *FamilyGuide*

April 5, 2017

Paul Woodward, Groundwater Engineer  
Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District  
8901 S 154th St  
Omaha, NE 68138

**RE: Proposed Scope Adjustment Due to Project Cost Underrun**

Dear Paul,

We are pleased to report that the project to update the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District's (P-MRNRD) Groundwater Management Plan (GMP) is currently running underbudget. As you are aware, on March 31, 2017, a Draft of the revised GMP was submitted to the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources for review. Due to efficiencies realized by the project staff, the work was completed well below the estimated fee proposed in the contract. Because of these efficiencies and based on our discussions with you, we are able propose adding scope to the project to help the District complete the next steps necessary to implement the changes proposed in the revised GMP. Specifically, we propose that part of the remaining budget be allocated to a new task to prepare a draft of new Groundwater Management Rules and Regulations.

I have attached a copy of a proposed project task fee reallocation due to the budget underrun and the following information is provided as explanation to the proposed changes:

- Task 1 - Currently the project management fees have been below the estimate. The task is not complete but we do anticipate continued efficiencies and therefore the task budget has been reduced by \$2,500.
- Task 2 - The hydrogeologic data review and GIS mapping was completed nearly 30% underbudget. We proposed that the task be closed out and that the remaining \$21,804 be reallocated to cover the increased scope in Task 3 and Task 6.
- Task 3 - Instead of conducting four stakeholder involvement meetings, we held six. The task is now complete and \$5,776 was reallocated from Task 2 to Task 3 to cover the added scope.
- Task 4 - The task is not complete and no change to the scope or fee is proposed to complete.
- Task 5 - The task is not complete and no change to the scope or fee is proposed to complete.
- Task 6 - This task was added to the scope of the project as an adjustment due to the current project cost underrun. Olsson will assist the P-MRNRD in the preparation of a revised set of groundwater rules and regulations to reflect the changes proposed in the draft GMP.

Paul Woodward  
Page Two  
April 5, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to continue to support the P-MRNRD on this important project.  
Call if you have any questions or need further information;

Sincerely,



Karen Griffin, PG  
Groundwater Technical Leader

**Attachment:** Proposed Project Task Fee Reallocation Due to Cost Underrun



Olsson Associates  
Groundwater Management Plan Update - Olsson Project #015-3424  
Proposed Project Task Fee Reallocation Due to Cost Underrun

Task	Project Task Fee Allocation in Contract dated 12/12/2015	Budget Remaining as of 4/4/17	Proposed Project Task Fee Reallocation	Description of Revised Task Allocation
Task 1: Project Management and Kickoff Meeting	\$13,483	\$9,830	\$7,330	Reduced budget to reflect current underrun
Task 2: Hydrogeologic Data Review and GIS Mapping	\$70,538	\$21,804	\$0	Reduced budget to reflect current underrun
Task 3: Coordination and Public Involvement Meetings	\$26,038	-\$5,776	\$0	Increased budget to reflect added scope
Task 4: Groundwater Management Plan Update	\$30,034	\$5,430	\$5,430	No Change
Task 5: Public Hearing, Comment Review and Revision	\$9,479	\$9,407	\$9,407	No Change
Task 6: Groundwater Rules and Regulations Preparation	\$0	\$0	\$18,528	Scope and Task added to contract due to contract underrun
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$149,572</b>	<b>\$40,695</b>	<b>\$40,695</b>	<b>No change to overall project budget</b>



13 April 2017

Mr. John Winkler  
Papio-Missouri River NRD  
**via email**

Re: Missouri River Federal Levee Systems R-613/R-616-613 Fee Status

Mr. Winkler:

This letter is an update to the contracted fee for the above-referenced project contract with FYRA Engineering and offers an opportunity to document scope items that have changed since the start of the most recent Phase III contract executed in July of 2015.

As you are aware, there have been numerous delays in the project attributable to the USACE processes and regulations regarding levee improvements and associated permitting that are continually changing. Since the last contract status update in December of 2016, our effort has been focused on the following items;

- Repetitive iterations related to **project performance**. The USACE is yet to confirm that they are satisfied with the numerous iterations of the modeling and modeling methods to determine left bank impacts and significance of impacts from the raising of R-613. The ATR team and other USACE staff have continuously asked that models be configured in different ways, only to achieve minimal/unmeasurable changes in the outcome. Our efforts are related to re-configuring the model, documenting changes, discussing them with NRD management and staff and the USACE, and finally revising the project performance report and related sections in the Environmental Assessment and the Section 408 applications.
- **Geotechnical design** of the levees has been a great source of frustration as you know. We have re-analyzed the levee design and discussed in detail the theory behind the design numerous times as the USACE has challenged sub-surface soil testing results obtained on site for soil parameters such as hydraulic conductivity, particle size, and soil type. Additionally, numerous iterations were made for anisotropy, and other modeling assumptions seeming to drive the design to a place the USACE is comfortable with compared to what actually exists on site. We have modeled and documented the outcome of multiple iterations of the analysis and performed and re-worked the entire geotechnical report to meet their demands, only to arrive at very minimal changes from what was originally proposed for design.



- The **plan sets and specifications** have been modified at least twice since December to address comments from the USACE received in the DrChecks process. This includes addressing (through detailed analysis) many comments received from the USACE that do not, in my opinion, reflect the intent of the 408 permit review process. This tedious effort, fortunately, saved the local sponsors millions of dollars in construction costs by not simply accepting the requests of the reviewers. These requested changes that could have had a significant impact on costs are detailed in the attached memo. This effort includes the plan changes, documentation of acceptance and non-acceptance of review comments on the plans and the printing of a post-100% submittal package that was never anticipated in the original design contract.
- In addition to the major impacts above, normal **project management** and team coordination duties have been strung out over a period of at least an additional year.

#### **Contract Status**

As of the date of the preparation of this invoice, FYRA is currently \$325,450.52 over the contracted fee. The total design fee for this phase is \$816,906.00 for FYRA and all subconsultants. The recent invoice history below shows when the design fee was exhausted and the billing since then.

<u>Invoice Date / #</u>	<u>Invoice Amount</u>	<u>Total Inv'd to Date</u>	<u>Inv'd Over Design Fee</u>
Nov. 2016 / 001-127	\$119,449.94	\$887,175.38	\$70,269.38
Dec. 2016 / 001-137 *	\$64,605.90	\$951,781.28	\$134,875.28
Jan. 2017 / 001-138 *	\$14,503.13	\$966,284.41	\$149,378.41
Feb. 2017 – No Invoice Submitted			
Mar. 2017 / 001-143	\$176,072.11	\$1,142,356.52	\$325,450.52

\* Indicates invoice was for subconsultant invoices only. No FYRA time was included.



Currently, there remains \$693,229.48 on this contract for remaining design phase work (\$139,151.44) and bidding and construction phase services (\$554,078.04). We are committed to trying to reduce the amount the contract runs over during construction and there are many strategies that can be employed during construction phase services to do so. While it appears that some amendment may be needed in the future, it is not necessary to execute a contract amendment at this time.

As always, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding this summary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Michael K. Sotak". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "M" and a long, sweeping tail.

Michael K. Sotak, PE

**Report on Purchases**  
**Construction Services, Professional Services, Personal Property**

**March, 2017**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Item / Task</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Cost</b>
March 1-31, 2017	Project maintenance	Gravel/rip rap	Martin Marietta	\$8,740.41
March 8, 2017	Washington Co. Rural Water System	Water meter pits	Municipal Supply	\$9,268.97
March 14, 2017	Little Papio, Papio Creek & West Branch Papio Creek	Channel/Levee Tree Maintenance	Terry Hughes Tree Service	\$19,330
March 14, 2107	Ralston Creek	Tree debris grinding and haul off	Metro Landscape Materials and Recycling Inc.	\$8,450
March 22, 2017	Papio Creek Levee System	9 replacement Hanson Model A floodgates (24" to 60" in diameter)	Royal Iron Company	\$10,054
March 2017	Kramper Lake/Danish Alps Rec. Area	Rip Rap and Limestone Chips	Lux Bros.	\$34,251.50

Updated: March 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 (W)

- **Big Papio:** (Cleveland)

- **West Branch:** (Cleveland)

- ★ Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96<sup>th</sup> 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 (W)

- **USDA PL 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed:** (Schumacher/Cleveland)
  - 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 (B)
  - ★ Purchase Agreements with Celebrity Homes for WP1 and WP2 (W)
  - ★ Phase II Professional Services Contract w/HDR for ZB-2 (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 (B) (Petermann)
  - ★ ENWRA Interlocal Agreement Amendment #5 (B) (Woodward)
  - ★ Papio Watershed Hydraulics Update Professional Services Contract with Stantec (B) (Laster)



# UNO seeks funds for Missouri River research station, including 90-foot observation tower

- By Eugene Curtin / World-Herald News Service/March 13, 2017

A Missouri River observation tower proposed for the north end of Bellevue's American Heroes Park would soar 90 feet, reaching 20 feet higher than the 70-foot Walter Scott Jr. Observation Tower at Mahoney State Park near Ashland.

Matt Knutson, an architect working with the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Nebraska Watershed Network, told the Bellevue City Council last month that the tower would be a major local landmark and an integral part of a \$1.7 million river research station that UNO wants to build amid the remains of the Kramer Power Plant, which was demolished in 2004.

Now if those involved can only find the money for it.

The overall project includes a research station intended to monitor the river's water quality, an interpretive center aimed at attracting students, an observation deck reaching out over the river, a landscaped garden and the observation tower.

The tower is by far the most expensive component. Equipped with an elevator to ensure equal access, it is expected to cost just over \$1 million.

The complete project was first proposed in 2014 and was expected to be operational sometime in 2015.

But funding problems have arisen, and another year is now expected to pass while UNO tries to find room in its budget for the research station, the interpretive center and the landscape garden. It was always understood that erection of the tower would depend on private grants and fundraising.

Bellevue council members repeated their previous support for the project and voted unanimously to authorize Assistant City Administrator Larry Burks to seek grants for the project.

In the meantime, organizers continue to be optimistic.

Knutson said the tower would offer an "amazing" view of Fontenelle Forest to the north, the Missouri River Valley to the south, farmland to the east and the city of Bellevue to the west.

Knutson said he and Alan Kolok, a professor in UNO's Department of Biology and director of the Nebraska Watershed Network, continue to advocate for construction of the river research station, which would join a network of such stations already established in the metro area.

"I know from speaking with Dr. Kolok that he very much wants to do this station, but he's not the only one who gets to decide that. So that is where we are with that," Knutson said.



# Papio-Missouri NRD approves draft of groundwater management plan

- By Jay Withrow / World-Herald staff writer
- 
- March 13, 2017

A draft on a groundwater management plan for parts of eastern Nebraska has been approved by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

At its meeting last week the NRD's board of directors approved the draft for the six-county NRD area: Sarpy, Douglas, Washington and Dakota Counties, plus the eastern parts of Burt and Thurston Counties.

Before the draft plan was approved, the NRD said, it held a series of meetings across the six-county area aimed at highlighting local groundwater concerns.

The draft will be submitted to the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources for a 90-day review. Following the review, the draft will be discussed at a public hearing before the NRD board grants final approval.

The draft eventually will replace the existing plan, approved in 1994. It can be viewed at [www.papionrd.org](http://www.papionrd.org).



# Bellevue Leader

March 15, 2017 • Volume 7 • Number 11

75 cents

## Levee demands frustrating officials

By Eugene Curtin

Leader Associate Editor

Long and arduous federal permitting procedures has one frustrated local official threatening to contact the White House if the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers doesn't soon permit work to proceed on improving the Missouri River levees that protect Bellevue and Offutt Air Force Base.

John Winkler, general manager of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, said he hopes work on the levees can begin late this summer but everything depends on getting permits from the Army Corps. That process, he said, is proving difficult because of the federal government's "unnecessary and budget-busting requirements."

"This levee project is too important, not only to the greater metro area and the State of Nebraska, but also to the national security interests of the United States, to be delayed or overly burdened by 'unnecessary' and budget-busting re-

quirements," Winkler said in an email.

He said the NRD and its partners have submitted everything the Army Corps has requested yet must still respond to numerous additional technical questions.

"Federal rules, regulations and requirements are burdensome, stifling, time consuming and expensive to comply with," Winkler said. "They tend to add millions and millions of dollars to project costs."

He estimated the federal government's "overly stringent design standards and overly burdensome regulations" have so far added \$5.2 million to the project's original cost estimate of \$25 million.

The NRD's engineering and consultant costs have doubled and tripled and there appears to be no end in sight, Winkler said.

If necessary, Winkler said, he will go higher in order to advance the project.

"The NRD continues to coordinate and communicate

with the mayors of Omaha and Bellevue, with Sarpy County, with [Nebraska] Gov. [Pete] Ricketts, and Nebraska's congressional delegation and will enlist their full political support in securing the permit in a timely manner," Winkler said.

"If necessary, the White House and the current administration will be enlisted to provide support as well."

A spokesman for the Army Corps of Engineers, which is charged with enforcing compliance with federal standards, said the levee project cannot advance until the federal government is satisfied the proposed modifications will not negatively impact the existing structure.

Ron Beyer, application project manager with the Army Corps' Omaha district, said the Corps has reviewed the proposed designs and suggested changes. He said the Papio NRD is expected to submit a revised design by Friday.

The likelihood of a late summer start seems slight, however, as Beyer said this fall

is likely the earliest the project could begin given the remaining need for information and the requirement that a public hearing be held after all information has been submitted and approved.

"This process may be complete as early as the fall of 2017, but is dependent on the applicants' completion of the design, performance analysis, and results of the public review," he said.

"It is very important that the applicant demonstrate that there is no increased risk to public safety or project performance for the federal levees."

The NRD, the City of Bellevue, the City of Omaha, Sarpy County and the State of Nebraska have pooled resources to cover the estimated \$25 million cost of raising the height of the river levees by two feet along their 19-mile length.

The project is mandated, but not funded, by the Federal Emergency Management Agency which ordered the improvements after the historic floods of 2011. Those

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floods did not breach the levee walls, and Winkler points out the Corps has said the levees were the best performing in their entire system during that flood-tested year.

"The NRD's technical analysis and construction details are sound and will rehabilitate the best performing levee system in the entire Corps district into an even better levee system to protect lives, property and important infrastructure like Offutt Air Force Base and STRATCOM," Winkler said.

"Very soon the NRD will implore the Corps of Engineers to move the permit application efficiently through their internal approval process and quickly issue a permit so work can begin in late summer."



By Ron Petak  
Executive Editor

## Making the Grade

**A+** March Madness. Sixty-four teams today dreaming of a national championship and by Monday morning that field will be cut to a sweet 16. This is one the best weekends of the sports calendar.

**A** Plans for a Bellevue Boys & Girls Club. I hope the necessary funds can be raised in the coming year to make this a reality. The suggested location at Bryan Middle School at 42nd Street and Giles Road is a great location and a facility like this will benefit not just the kids from that neighborhood, but from all parts of the city. Hopefully construction starts sooner than later.

**D-** Bureaucratic red tape. The federal government said the Missouri River levees need improvement, and local officials worked tirelessly the last few years to find the \$25 million needed to satisfy that demand. Now, here comes the federal government once again holding up the process by requiring revision upon revision to the plans — revisions, by the way, that have added another \$5 million to the project. Seemingly lost in all this is the fact the levees held during the 2011 floods. I'm not an engineer, but I trust John Winkler of the Papio-Missouri River NRD when he says the red tape is overly stringent and overly burdensome.

# Nebraska lawmakers hear testimony on bill to ban local governments from hiring lobbyists with tax money

- By Emily Nohr / World-Herald Bureau/3-23-17

LINCOLN — A state lawmaker is seeking to prohibit local governments from paying for lobbyists with tax dollars.

State Sen. John Kuehn of Heartwell said Wednesday that cities, counties and school boards can turn to elected officials, superintendents or managers to represent them at the State Capitol.

But opponents — including the mayors of the state's two largest cities — said lobbyists play a vital role in advocating for their constituents' interests.

The hiring of lobbyists, supporters of the bill argued, is costly, leading to more taxpayer spending and more lobbying.

During a five-year period, 17 Nebraska school districts spent \$2.2 million on lobbying activities — money that wasn't spent to educate students, Kuehn said.

"This has become an institutionalized profit center," Kuehn told members of the Legislature's Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, noting that 38 lobbyists are registered this year to represent local governments.

Legislative Bill 664 is part of a four-bill lobbying-related package sponsored by Kuehn. A second bill, LB 153, would require former state elected officials to wait two years after leaving office before they could become lobbyists.

Anyone who works to affect matters before the Legislature on behalf of someone else is considered a lobbyist and is required to register with the state. Exceptions include allowing employees of the executive branch who are acting in their official capacity to lobby without registering.

Under LB 664, political subdivisions would be barred from using revenue from taxes or fees to employ a lobbyist.

The bill, as written, would prohibit employees, such as a superintendent, from lobbying, too, said Frank Daley, executive director of the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission, who testified in a neutral capacity.

But Kuehn said that's not his intent, and he would work to clarify the bill's language.

While no states ban local governments from using tax dollars to pay for lobbyists, 10 states prohibit state agencies from using public funds to retain a lobbyist, Kuehn said.

The bill drew letters of opposition from Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert and Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler, plus Omaha City Council President Ben Gray on behalf of the council.

"While I have testified, written letters, and personally discussed legislative matters with senators, it is impractical to carry this responsibility as a full-time mayor for all bills that positively and negatively impact Lincoln," Beutler wrote.

Common Cause Nebraska, a government watchdog group, and the Nebraska Chapter of Americans for Prosperity, a conservative organization that advocates for smaller government, both supported LB 664, as did Rod Edwards, a spokesman for Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom.

Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue questioned whether the measure would give well-paid private groups a stronger voice.

"You're the example of what I fear," she said, referring to Americans for Prosperity, which is funded by the Koch brothers.

The committee took no immediate action.

[http://www.omaha.com/news/metro/omaha-city-council-approves-development-package-for-visionary-billion-project/article\\_5b8745be-4e69-5616-86be-95b6c612591d.html](http://www.omaha.com/news/metro/omaha-city-council-approves-development-package-for-visionary-billion-project/article_5b8745be-4e69-5616-86be-95b6c612591d.html)

## Omaha City Council approves development package for 'visionary' \$1.2 billion project near Boys Town

By Roseann Moring / World-Herald staff writer Mar 29, 2017 Updated 6 hrs ago



Jennifer Rasmussen

Developer Jay Noddle's plan is for a nearly 500-acre, mixed use development, with multiple neighborhoods, apartments, commercial buildings, a hotel, open space and a park and a dining area.

Approvals for major development in western Douglas County sailed through the Omaha City Council meeting Tuesday.

Developer Jay Noddle presented his planned \$1.2 billion development near Boys Town, saying he hopes that the project has “a lasting impact for decades and hopefully centuries.”

The plan is for a nearly 500-acre, mixed use development, with multiple neighborhoods, apartments, commercial buildings, a hotel, open space and a park and a dining area.

By comparison, the Aksarben Village development — also led by Noddle — covers about 70 acres.

The Boys Town project is expected to take roughly 20 years to finish and will be west of 144th Street from West Dodge Road to south of Pacific Street.

The council voted 7-0 on a package of items including zoning changes, a development agreement, a plat approval, a subdivision agreement and an interlocal agreement with the Village of Boys Town.

“This is truly what I consider a visionary development,” said Councilwoman Aimee Melton. “I really do think this is kind of the direction of the future.”



Rod Tevis, a neighbor of the project, told the council he wanted to make sure that the planned apartments and condos on the south side would be a maximum of three stories and that trees would be planted on the south side of the property.

Noddle, who said he'd previously spoken to Tevis about his concerns, said yes to both.

Work is underway to clear trees from the property, which includes land formerly occupied by a Boys Town farm. Infrastructure development will begin this spring, Noddle has said.

Conceptually, Noddle said, the area is to be a walkable community, where residents of new housing can stroll to dining, shopping, entertainment and work sites.

The plan includes:

- » Nearly 1.4 million square feet of offices, 500,000 square feet of retail, a 300-room hotel, 1,500 apartments, 140 town houses and 440 single-family houses.
- » Open space in about a third of the land, including green buffers, parkland and public squares.
- » A park with an amphitheater, a lake and a dining district. A focal point is to be a cluster of buildings reminiscent of or actually moved from the old Boys Town farm and converted into shops and restaurants.
- » A boulevard running parallel to 144th Street and through the entire development.

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#### MORE INFORMATION



Will companies look to other cities if they can't find room to expand in Omaha? Industrial space is scarce

# Pleasant season may spring from early rain in Omaha metro area

- By Nancy Gaarder / World-Herald staff writer/Apr 3, 2017 Updated 6 hrs ago

April rains are setting the stage for a healthy start to spring.

Recent rain has pushed Omaha past normal for precipitation for the year by about two-thirds of an inch, and a soggy start to the workweek is in the forecast, said Scott Dergan, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

The wet start to April, however, is no indication that an overly rainy spring lies ahead, Dergan said. Spring forecasts are a dicey proposition, especially in Nebraska.

The U.S. Climate Prediction Center says there's no clear signal of whether spring will be wetter, drier or near normal for rainfall in Nebraska and western Iowa. Dergan said the center is giving slightly favorable odds to a warmer-than-usual spring in the Midlands.

Early indications are that the storm track, on average, may travel across the northern U.S., Dergan said. If that happens, the northern Plains would have a wet spring and some of that could bleed south.

Just as important, a northern jet stream could affect the feel of spring in this area.

Dergan said the jet stream could set the stage for humid and sometimes stormy weather this spring. The jet stream is a fast-moving river of air in the upper atmosphere that acts as a barrier between hemispheric masses of cold air to the north and warm air to the south.

If the jet stream does track across the north, then warm, humid air from the Gulf of Mexico will flow northward. This would feed humidity into the region and provide fuel for severe weather when occasional cold fronts ripple through, Dergan said.

Drought is a concern in southwest Nebraska, across Kansas into Missouri and in southern Iowa, according to the National Weather Service.

Spring flooding remains a risk in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa, according to the weather service. Dergan said the flood risk from snowmelt is over in the Missouri River basin because the mountain and Plains snowpack in the upper Missouri basin has washed out.

Instead, the flood risk is from heavy spring rain that could cause localized flooding in individual watersheds.

Along the Platte River, heavy rain could generate flooding, he said, because the river will be full with snowmelt from the Rocky Mountains.



# Army Corps of Engineers brought to court over complaints about 2011 Missouri River flooding

- Apr 3, 2017



Water rushes through a levee break near Percival, Iowa, in June 2011. The town was not in the flood plain, but the damage to the levee allowed almost the entire Missouri River valley in Fremont County to fill with water.

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is defending itself at trial against more than 300 farmers and landowners who say the agency's management of the Missouri River has contributed to major flooding in five states, most notably 2011 flooding that caused billions of dollars in damage.

The states in question are Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, Missouri and Kansas.

The lawsuit, filed in 2014 in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, argues that the Corps has altered its practices regarding the river's water storage, release and flow management since the mid-2000s, de-emphasizing flood control while pushing to restore habitat for endangered species. It contends that the Corps unconstitutionally deprived plaintiffs of their land, essentially taking it without compensation.

Although the lawsuit doesn't specify the amount of damages being sought, the landowners' attorney has said it could exceed \$250 million. The plaintiffs believe case law is on their side, given a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in December 2012 that the federal government is not automatically exempt from paying for damage caused by temporary flooding from its dams.

The case reflects long-standing debate about the Corps' management of the river as the agency tries to strike a balance among competing interests: landowners, the barge industry, water suppliers, hydropower utilities, environmentalists and recreational users of the waterway, notably on upriver reservoirs. Regulating the river's levels comes through the Corps' management of discharges from a half dozen large upstream reservoirs, each meant to hold snowmelt and other excess water during the spring before the Corps gradually releases it the rest of the year.

In court filings, the federal government argues that authorities never promised to stop all flooding along the river, which flows into the Mississippi River north of St. Louis.

The Corps — which has said it is required by Congress and the courts to act in the best interests of the river — maintains that providing habitat for endangered species didn't exacerbate the inundation six years ago.

The Corps typically does not comment publicly about litigation, and it didn't reply to recent messages from the Associated Press.

Outside experts who reviewed the 2011 flooding said the Corps did the best it could in dealing with record amounts of water that flowed into the river after unusually heavy spring rain in Montana and North Dakota.

That flooding lasted more than three months after the Corps began releasing massive amounts of water from swollen upstream reservoirs. It overwhelmed levees, carved gouges up to 50 feet deep, created sand dunes 15 feet high, deposited debris in farmers' fields and devastated hundreds of thousands of acres of mostly farmland.

Caroline Pufalt, the St. Louis-based chairwoman of the Sierra Club's Missouri River Network, said blaming the Corps on environmental grounds is "a red herring," and that while the Corps may make decisions in the interest of habitat, such actions are rare.

Pufalt said the Corps did the best it could six years ago, given "unusual circumstances" involving so much water in the Missouri River system.

"These floods were kind of unavoidable," Pufalt said. "The folks who have filed this lawsuit mistakenly think there's some magic thing the Corps can do, given the current river, that will take away their flood risk, and that's not going to happen."

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[http://www.omaha.com/news/nation/army-corps-of-engineers-brought-to-court-over-complaints-about/article\\_b9e0d1a0-e6f6-5939-a13c-b7a29d8330b5.html](http://www.omaha.com/news/nation/army-corps-of-engineers-brought-to-court-over-complaints-about/article_b9e0d1a0-e6f6-5939-a13c-b7a29d8330b5.html)

# Sarpy County says its residents pay more property tax than Douglas County's, asks state to step in

By Emily Nitcher [emily.nitcher@owh.com](mailto:emily.nitcher@owh.com), 402-444-1192/World-Herald staff writer Apr 10, 2017

Sarpy County Board members are reviving a longtime gripe: that Douglas County residents aren't paying their fair share of taxes because of the way their county's property is assessed.

It's a grievance that comes amid an outcry in Douglas County over sharp valuation increases this year and efforts by Douglas County officials to reduce those hikes.

To Sarpy board members, however, the flap in Douglas County is just the latest example of how that county's valuations are less accurate than those in Sarpy. And they contend that those differences mean that Sarpy residents are treated unfairly, especially when taxing jurisdictions cross county lines.

They have a case. Based on the two counties' assessment practices, it's likely that the owner of a home that could sell for \$150,000 is paying about \$100 more in property taxes in Sarpy County than it would if its valuation were set by Douglas County.

State law requires a county's median property valuation to be between 92 and 100 percent of market value.

Sarpy County Assessor Dan Pittman has said that he aims for property to be assessed in the middle of that range, at 96 percent of market value. Douglas County Assessor Diane Battiato, meanwhile, reacted to the outrage about increases by saying she is aiming for the county's median this year to be near the bottom, at 93 percent of market value.

If the Sarpy County assessor values a \$150,000 home at 96 percent of market value, it would have a valuation of \$144,000. That works out to a tax bill of \$3,207 if the house were in the Omaha school district.

But if that same home were valued at 93 percent of market value, as Douglas County has aimed for, it would have a valuation of \$139,500. And its tax bill would be \$3,107, a difference of \$100.

It's not quite that simple, of course. The target applies to the whole county, and many properties are valued below the target and others above.

Sarpy County Board Chairman Don Kelly said that even if the percentages were set the same in the two counties, Sarpy County residents would still be taxed unfairly because property in Douglas County is not reassessed as often and thus tends to lag below market levels.

Last year, the state ordered valuation increases across a large swath of west Omaha and decreases in northeast Omaha after determining that their assessed values were too far outside the accepted range.

A 2016 World-Herald analysis found that 56 percent of houses sold in Sarpy County in recent years were valued in the state-required range of 92 to 100 percent of market value. The ones that weren't were mainly a little higher or a little lower.

In Douglas County, less than 29 percent of houses hit the target. About 45 percent had valuations that were too low, even after state-ordered increases last year. And one in nine Douglas County house sales was assessed at less than 80 percent of its sale price.

That's one reason Douglas County valuations increased so much this year.

"Although I sympathize with the Douglas County taxpayer, my concern here is for the people that this board of equalization represents, who by any measure of merit are going to pay an unfair and unequal amount of taxes," Kelly said.

Sarpy County Board member Brian Zuger, who represents Bellevue, said he has heard from residents who are concerned that they're paying more into the Omaha Public Schools than their neighbors across Harrison Street.

One of the largest costs in Sarpy County residents' property tax bills is for school districts, and the Omaha, Millard and Gretna districts all extend into both counties.

Sarpy County Board members said they'd like to form a committee to push for change in the Nebraska Legislature. Board member Jim Warren said they'd likely invite school districts, cities and other interested entities to be a part of the committee, which would look for ways to adjust state law to minimize the differences between counties.

It's unlikely that anything will get done this year. Sarpy and Douglas Counties have already submitted their valuations to the state, and the Legislature is in the middle of its current session.

At issue for Sarpy board members is the 92 to 100 range and a state requirement that valuations have to be updated only every six years. Board members said everyone should be shooting for the same number and updating values with the same frequency.

"The state either needs to step in and do some equalization, or somehow we try to figure out how to make a balance in Sarpy County because it isn't fair," Warren said. "It isn't fair to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars across the county line."

State Property Tax Administrator Ruth Sorensen said the range is needed because the real estate market is not precise.

She also said Sarpy's complaint is something the state has heard from other areas with school districts crossing county lines.

"We don't want anyone paying their unfair share," Sorensen said.

Although not required by law, Pittman said his office updates values annually so increases and decreases happen in small increments, which makes it easier for homeowners to understand.

Douglas County does not adjust values annually but operates within the six-year window required under state law.

Battiato, the Douglas County assessor, said the two counties do things differently because they have different markets and Douglas County has significantly more parcels than Sarpy County.

The county's valuations are based on sales, and sales and market trends can differ depending on which side of Harrison Street you're on, Battiato said. The counties are not always going to mirror each other, she said.

"Everyone has their opinions, and we're just doing the best we can," she said.

This year in a series of meetings, Sarpy board members considered urging Pittman to match Douglas County's valuation target, but the idea was quashed when school superintendents, city administrators, mayors and sanitary improvement district representatives said it would hurt their budgets.

Douglas County Board Chairwoman Mary Ann Borgeson said the two counties have a good working relationship, and Douglas County is "more than willing to work with everybody and anybody that wants to look at this."

The Sarpy board sent a letter last month to Sorensen expressing its frustration after she had told Douglas County that it needed only to fall within the 92 to 100 percent range.

"We respectfully request you truly equalize property values across the state and start by mandating similar assessment practices across county lines," the letter to Sorensen said.

Sorensen responded that it's up to individual county assessors to set property valuations based on their analysis of the local real estate market.

Sorensen also encouraged Sarpy County officials to take their concerns to the state's Tax Equalization and Review Commission, which reviews county valuations.

Sarpy County Board members said at a recent meeting that something needs to change.

"My angst is not with Douglas County," Kelly said. "My angst is with a system that allows this to happen. It's not right."

# Lincoln bike-share program gears up for fall start

- Apr 10, 2017 Updated 5 hrs ago

LINCOLN (AP) — Lincoln's bike-share program will likely begin this fall with 100 bikes and 17 stations across downtown and its university campuses.

The program will be slightly more expensive than originally planned because a federal grant's rules require the city to purchase bikes made with American steel, according to the Lincoln Journal Star.

The original estimate for the program was \$750,000, with 80 percent of the money coming from grants and the remaining amount from local donations. An additional \$85,000 is now required after the city discovered the steel requirement.

Lincoln transportation planner Kellee Van Bruggen said the program already had to raise an additional \$200,000 to pay for program operations for the next several years.

The city is currently negotiating the details of the contract with B-Cycle, the Wisconsin-based company with bikes in dozens of U.S. cities that will operate the Lincoln program. The deal is expected to go to the City Council soon.

Ben Turner, coordinator of Omaha's Heartland B-Cycle program, said B-Cycle will provide its latest equipment to Lincoln, which includes lighter-weight bikes.

"I rode about 18 miles on the 2.0 bicycle" recently in San Antonio, Turner said of the new bicycles. "It was a pretty smooth, easy ride."

The docking stations will give users the option to rent bikes using credit or debit cards, or through a smartphone app.

The program criteria states that the 17 stations must be able to have adequate sunlight, because they are solar-powered.

[http://www.omaha.com/townnews/cycling/lincoln-bike-share-program-gears-up-for-fall-start/article\\_0ab7f079-9035-5ff9-92cb-3d42309badeb.html](http://www.omaha.com/townnews/cycling/lincoln-bike-share-program-gears-up-for-fall-start/article_0ab7f079-9035-5ff9-92cb-3d42309badeb.html)

# Sarpy County says sewer funding plan is necessary for development

- By Emily Nitcher and Paul Hammel / World-Herald staff writers/April 12, 2017

It's a common gripe in Sarpy County.

Ask a city or county official about what's needed to keep the state's fastest growing county booming and they'll respond, "You see, there's this ridgeline ... ."

The natural ridgeline they're referring to cuts roughly east and west across the middle of Sarpy County, and officials say it's an impediment to development and growth.

North of the line, land drains to the Papillion Creek and a sewer system is in place to send wastewater north.

But south of the ridge, the land drains to the Platte River and there is no sewer system to serve potential businesses and housing developments.

That lack of infrastructure is blocking progress and growth in one of the few places still available for development in the metropolitan area, according to a Sarpy County state senator.

State Sen. Sue Crawford of Bellevue has introduced legislation to make it easier to pay for a sewer system that would be built in stages and could eventually cost \$220 million.

"We have an area that's prime for growth that's not living up to its potential because it lacks basic infrastructure," Crawford said.

Her Legislative Bill 253, which is scheduled for debate by the Legislature on Thursday, would allow cities and villages to form a public agency with a county to oversee an entire region's sewer system. In Sarpy County, it would involve all five cities and the county.

The new sewer lines and water treatment facilities south of the ridgeline would be financed by sewer and connection fees paid by new homeowners and new businesses, Crawford said. The new countywide sewer agency could also levy property taxes, she said, but would use that authority only if sewer fees became inadequate.

Officials in Sarpy County have been studying the issue for almost 10 years and have been lobbying in support of Crawford's bill.

But there's a sense of urgency for the legislation as the pace of development has picked up, and as the county prepares for the eventual construction of a freeway along Platteview Road, which crosses the southern portion of the county that now lacks sewers.

Just this month Facebook announced a 146-acre campus with two 450,000-square-foot buildings and a 70,000-square-foot administrative building at Nebraska Highway 50 and Capehart Road in Papillion. Sarpy County has also added data centers from Fidelity, Yahoo, Cabela's and insurance group Travelers in recent years.

Papillion Mayor David Black said he estimates that Papillion will run out of land for development in the next five to seven years if the bill does not go through. Only about 40 percent of Sarpy County is developed, Black said, but the growth of Papillion, Springfield and Gretna depends on sewer infrastructure south of the ridgeline.

Crawford specifically pointed to potential growth areas along Highway 50, around the Nebraska Crossing Outlets and along the projected U.S. 34 freeway on Platteview Road.

Said Black, "If you don't have sewer infrastructure in place, land is not developed."

If the countywide agency is created, the first phase of work is set to begin in 2019. There are four separate phases, with the final one set to begin in 2044.

If the agency is not created, then it's back to the drawing board for the cities and county.

Wastewater currently generated south of the ridge is handled by several small, private treatment facilities or by a small facility owned by the City of Springfield. Most people living south of the ridgeline have septic systems.

In the case of Facebook, the county is doing some sewage gymnastics. Because there is no sewer system where the new Facebook campus will be located, a \$690,000 pump station is being built to pump sewage north over the ridge line. Sewer fees from the company and a \$75,000 state economic development grant are expected to cover that cost.

Black said the countywide agency would allow representatives from all five cities and the county to have input on the development of the sewer system.

The prospect of a new property taxing entity for sewers raised questions for some members of the Legislature's Revenue Committee. The committee, which is chaired by a Sarpy County senator, Jim Smith of Papillion, voted 5-0 to advance LB 253 in February. But three lawmakers abstained.

One was North Platte Sen. Mike Groene, who said he was concerned that such a taxing entity would be formed and embark on a pricey project, without a vote of the people.

Henderson Sen. Curt Friesen, who was also "present and not voting" on advancement of the sewer bill, said he was concerned that homeowners far from the location of the new sewers would get stuck paying the bill if the housing market takes a downturn and sewer fees are insufficient to pay debts.

"What happens if things go bad? Who's on the hook for the bill?" Friesen asked.

Crawford said residents of La Vista and Bellevue, which already have sewers, could be asked to pay some of the cost of the new sewers in the southern part of the county. But they would also get some benefit by expanding the county's tax base and possibly lowering their own taxes.

She pointed to estimates being distributed by backers of the bill. Those project \$19 million in additional property tax revenue for cities in Sarpy County and \$21 million extra for the county if areas south of the ridgeline are developed.

That same pamphlet, generated by Sarpy County Administrator Mark Wayne, projects an increase in sales tax revenue of \$15 million for the county and \$45 million for the state.

And Sarpy County Board members Brian Zuger and Don Kelly ask that the senators look at the county's track record on taxing.

A bill passed in 1994 gave Sarpy County the power to levy a special tax or issue revenue bonds to build and operate a sewer system in rural areas.

Fred Uhe, spokesman for the county, said the county has never used the levy to build or operate sewers in the county. Instead, the county used a different approach, issuing bonds backed by the taxing authority of the county to pay for sewer construction. Those bonds were paid off from sewer connection fees and not property taxes.

Zuger and Kelly said they're not interested in raising taxes for residents of Sarpy County but think getting a sewer system to the southern half of the county is critical to Sarpy's future.

"It's true, this bill will give us the ability to levy property tax," Kelly said. "But past performance has shown we have never done that."

# Scott Bovick, Dan Hoins picked as Sarpy County administrator finalists

- By Emily Nitcher / World-Herald staff writer

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- Apr 13, 2017

- The two finalists to be the next Sarpy County administrator have deep ties within the county.

Sarpy County Deputy Administrator Scott Bovick and Papillion City Administrator Dan Hoins are the finalists to replace Administrator Mark Wayne.

Wayne has been the administrator since 1991. His contract ends June 30. In 2016, Wayne had a gross salary of \$134,528.

The county started seeking applicants in February for candidates with a minimum of a master's degree in public or business administration, five years of experience in supervising employees and 10 years of experience in management.

Fred Uhe, spokesman for the county, said there were about 40 applicants.

After the applicants were reviewed, several candidates were interviewed. Bovick and Hoins emerged as the finalists because of their experience and backgrounds, according to a press release from the county.

County Board Chairman Don Kelly said he was pleased with the amount of interest and quality applicants.

"This interest bodes well for the future of Sarpy and indicates the interest in working for the fastest-growing county in the state," he said.

Bovick has been with the county for eight years. Before that he was the city administrator in Nebraska City and an assistant city administrator in Blair. In 2016, Bovick was paid \$119,488.

Hoins has been Papillion's city administrator since 2000 after an 18-year career in law enforcement. In 2015, Hoins had a gross salary of \$142,880.

Before taking the city's top administrative position, Hoins was Papillion's police chief.

Uhe said that in the coming days the county would develop the next steps to select the new administrator.

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